

GENERAL GEORGE CROOK'S DEVELOPMENT AS A PRACTITIONER
OF IRREGULAR WARFARE DURING THE INDIAN WARS

A thesis presented to the Faculty of the U.S. Army
Command and General Staff College in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree

MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE
Military History

by

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2017

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REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE				<i>Form Approved</i> OMB No. 0704-0188	
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1. REPORT DATE (DD-MM-YYYY) 9-06-2017		2. REPORT TYPE Master's Thesis		3. DATES COVERED (From - To) AUG 2016 – JUN 2017	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE General George Crook's Development as a Practitioner of Irregular Warfare During the Indian Wars				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S) Maj Nicholas J. Cruz, USMC				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) U.S. Army Command and General Staff College ATTN: ATZL-SWD-GD Fort Leavenworth, KS 66027-2301				8. PERFORMING ORG REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for Public Release; Distribution is Unlimited					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
14. ABSTRACT Following the conclusion of the Mexican-American War, the expansion of the United States to the west coast in the nineteenth century required the conquering of the Native American tribes of the west. This was a grueling and protracted war that spanned nearly fifty years, tested the national will, and forged the nation's identity. The frontier Army was critical in this process. General George Crook emerged from this time because of his success in defeating the Native Americans when few before him could, in the most difficult environs on the continent. His success is directly attributed to his unique understanding of the context and nuance associated with the Indian problem. This study evaluates the factors that facilitated his development as a practitioner of Irregular Warfare in the Rogue River Wars, the Snake River War, and the Apache Wars. These lessons offer valuable and timeless nature of Irregular Warfare useful for today's practitioners.					
15. SUBJECT TERMS General George Crook, Irregular Warfare, Apache Wars, Snake River War, Rogue River Wars, Tonto Basin Campaign					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT (U)	18. NUMBER OF PAGES 97	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT (U)	b. ABSTRACT (U)	c. THIS PAGE (U)			19b. PHONE NUMBER (include area code)

Standard Form 298 (Rev. 8-98)
Prescribed by ANSI Std. Z39.18

MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE

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The opinions and conclusions expressed herein are those of the student author and do not necessarily represent the views of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College or any other governmental agency. (References to this study should include the foregoing statement.)

ABSTRACT

GENERAL GEORGE CROOK'S DEVELOPMENT AS A PRACTITIONER OF
IRREGULAR WARFARE DURING THE INDIAN WARS, by Maj Nicholas J. Cruz, 97
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Following the conclusion of the Mexican-American War, the expansion of the United States to the west coast in the nineteenth century required the conquering of the Native American tribes of the west. This was a grueling and protracted war that spanned nearly fifty years, tested the national will, and forged the nation's identity. The frontier Army was critical in this process. General George Crook emerged from this time because of his success in defeating the Native Americans when few before him could, in the most difficult environs on the continent.

His success is directly attributed to his unique understanding of the context and nuance associated with the Indian problem. This study evaluates the factors that facilitated his development as a practitioner of Irregular Warfare in the Rogue River Wars, the Snake River War, and the Apache Wars. These lessons offer valuable and timeless nature of Irregular Warfare useful for today's practitioners.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to acknowledge my partners in the Irregular Warfare Scholars program. Chad, Dan, Devon, and Scott, the unending discussions about digital nativity, transnational organized crime, Mao, and making the trains run on time were the best. To our mentor and leader, Lieutenant Colonel Jerry Moon, thanks for challenging us and forcing us to open our aperture and think critically in a manner that will make us better leaders for our services.

To my committee, thanks for dragging me along. It was not the landing desired, but the wheels all made it on the deck, barely. Mr. Bud Meador, Semper Fidelis, it's Marines like you that made our Corps what it is.

Last, my friends and family. Your support and patience made it possible to get this done. Addy and B, I missed you both so much, thanks for letting your dad follow his passion. Ashley, thanks for holding it together.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE THESIS APPROVAL PAGE	iii
ABSTRACT.....	iv
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	v
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	vi
ILLUSTRATIONS	vii
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION	1
Major General George Crook's Roadmap for Irregular Warfare	1
CHAPTER 2 WE COULD SEE THE WHITES OF EACH OTHER'S EYES	6
CHAPTER 3 A MAN IN THE MIDDLE OF A PRAIRIE DOG TOWN	40
CHAPTER 4 APACHERIA	58
CHAPTER 5 A PROBLEM OF STRATEGY AND TACTICS; METHOD AND ORGANIZATION	81
BIBLIOGRAPHY	87

ILLUSTRATIONS

	Page
Figure 1. Rogue and Pit River Campaigns, 1855-1857.....	11
Figure 2. Snake River War, 1864-1868.....	46
Figure 3. Tonto Basin Campaign, 1872-1873	60

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Compounding the challenges posed by this growing global instability will be the emergence of an increasingly complex and lethal battlefield. The widespread availability of sophisticated weapons and equipment will “level the playing field” and negate our traditional technological superiority. The lines separating the levels of war, and distinguishing combatant from “non-combatant,” will blur, and adversaries, confounded by our “conventional” superiority, will resort to asymmetrical means to redress the imbalance. Further complicating the situation will be the ubiquitous media whose presence will mean that all future conflicts will be acted out before an international audience.

— General Charles C. Krulak, “The Strategic Corporal: Leadership in the Three Block War”

Major General George Crook’s Roadmap for Irregular Warfare

General Krulak (the 31st Commandant of the United States Marine Corps) is not discussing the Islamic State, the Taliban, the Syrian Civil War, the Arab Spring, or the Russian invasions of Georgia and Ukraine. That quote was written nearly 20 years ago, reflecting on the United States military’s experiences in Somalia, Bosnia, and Haiti. General Kulak, while discussing closing technology gaps and the ubiquitous media presence at the dawn of the information age, could not have foreseen the interconnectivity the internet would soon provide, the impact of social media, the proliferation of unmanned aerial vehicle technology, and the critical reliance on space and cyberspace as warfighting domains. Yet, the points he makes are just as salient today.

While the United States must continue to prepare, train, and equip for large-scale peer or near-peer conventional warfare, the breadth of the republic’s history teaches that Irregular Warfare occurs much more frequently. It is increasingly complex and shaped by

a myriad of factors, which require nuanced study and understanding. The Joint Operating Concept defines Irregular Warfare as:

a violent struggle among state and non-state actors for legitimacy and influence over the relevant populations. IW favors indirect and asymmetric approaches, though it may employ the full range of military and other capabilities, in order to erode an adversary's power, influence, and will. It is inherently a protracted struggle that will test the resolve of our Nation and our strategic partners.¹

Over the last 160 years, the United States' military history reinforces this frequently and consistently. Irregular Warfare remains an essential element of the United States' ability to impact and shape its national interests. Dating back to the Indian Wars, Banana Wars, the Philippines, the Boxer Rebellion, the Punitive Expedition into Mexico, Vietnam, the Balkans, Somalia, Iraq, Afghanistan, and now with the Islamic State, the United States has engaged in Irregular Warfare somewhere around the globe since the end of its Civil War.

Serious study of Irregular Warfare recognizes that a thorough understanding of context and nuance, however difficult to attain at times, is the foundation for extracting meaningful lessons that can shape military thought in constructive ways. The same can be said for the study of military history. While history is not prescriptive, it is insightful, especially when intellectual rigor is applied to understand the required context and nuance. The history of the United States provides many examples, which yield fruitful insight into the very nature of Irregular Warfare, perhaps none more so than the struggle to subdue the Native Americans in the American West.

This conflict fits perfectly into the current working doctrinal definition of Irregular Warfare used by the United States Department of Defense. It was a violent struggle between a nation and non-nation state for legitimacy over populations. The war

involved the United States attempting to exert its will and impose its way of life on the Native American tribes of the west. The tribes favored asymmetric tactics, which were initially effective against the conventional Army. In addition, it was extremely protracted and tested the national will of the American people.

So protracted in fact, the United States government still manages the consequences of it today through the United States Department of the Interior's Bureau of Indian Affairs. While Native American tribes may no longer have the capacity to fight a protracted insurgency against the United States government, significant issues still occur, even as late as 2016, demonstrated by the large-scale protests of the Dakota Access pipeline by the Standing Rock Sioux.²

While the tools of warfare continue to evolve, its nature does not. With the United States military currently engaged in combat across the range of military operations, short of major combat operations, with no foreseeable end, there must be serious consideration given not just to the study of Irregular Warfare itself, but the military professionals who were successful practitioners of Irregular Warfare.

The lessons the Indian Wars provide are still salient and must not be lost to posterity, especially for professional military study. The noted frontier historian, Robert Utley, suggests some ignore the vital lessons because of, "a national guilt complex that would expiate sin by bending history to modern social purposes."³ While the United States may continue to struggle over time to come to terms with episodes in history to help forge its national identity, the profession of arms does not have that luxury:

I see the American military tradition as in part a record—a record as we perceive it today, not necessarily as it was in fact—of those people and events of the past that we have singled out to provide us with inspiration, edification, guidance, and

even, as I have intimated, self-reproach. Besides this record, I take the American military tradition to be the accumulated body of military usage, belief, custom, and practice that has descended to us from the past. It is also policy, doctrine, thought, and institutions as they have evolved by selection, rejection, and modification through past generations to today.⁴

This thesis will focus on the development of General George Crook as a practitioner of Irregular Warfare. It will attempt to examine the factors that made him an effective Indian fighter. While his career in combat spanned nearly forty years, this study will focus on three aspects of Crook's development. First, his initial assignment to California. Next, his command of the District of Boise in the Idaho and Oregon Territories. Finally, his first tour in Arizona subduing the Apache. General Crook is the singular figure in understanding the war against the American Indians as a study in Irregular Warfare. The intent of this study is to neither lionize nor criticize General Crook, there is substantial literature, both contemporary and from his time, which attempts to do both. Instead, it intends to use his time and experience leading the United States Army's war against the American Indians as a historical case study in the successful prosecution of Irregular Warfare, applying the contemporary understanding of Irregular Warfare to the context of his time.

Thankfully, for the study of this topic, there is substantial literature available for research. There is an extensive body of well researched secondary sources on the subject, some relying heavily on firsthand accounts from the Army's perspective. Most importantly, there is also a wealth of primary source material from General Crook himself, due in large part to the scrutiny he came under at the end of his time in the Department of Arizona and subsequent reassignment to the Department of the Platte in 1886. In addition, many of the soldiers who served with Crook during the various Indian

campaigns he participated in, most notably the work of Crook's adjutant, Captain John Bourke, provide valuable insight into Crook's actions. Additional primary sources from Generals Howard and Sheridan, as well as the Secretary of War's Annual Reports provide extensive background and insight into the circumstances, which surrounded Crook on the frontier.

¹ U.S. Department of Defense, *Irregular Warfare (IW) Joint Operating Concept (JOC)* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, September 2007), 1.

² Jack Healy, "North Dakota Oil Pipeline: Who's Fighting and Why," *New York Times*, August 26, 2016, accessed December 15, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/02/us/north-dakota-oil-pipeline-battle-whos-fighting-and-why.html>.

³ Robert M. Utley, *The Contribution of the Frontier to the American Military Tradition*, The Harmon Memorial Lectures in Military History, No. 19 (Colorado Springs, CO: U.S. Air Force Academy, 1977), 1.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.

CHAPTER 2

WE COULD SEE THE WHITES OF EACH OTHER'S EYES

When our big war did come, it was the fewest of those men who could expand enough to grasp the situation, and the consequence was that as a rule they were failures, and because they had to be superseded they continually railed at the ingratitude of Republics, etc.

— General George Crook, quoted in Martin Schmitt,
General George Crook, His Autobiography

George Crook was born the ninth of ten children on September 8, 1828, at his family's farm near Taylorsville, Ohio. The Crook family was relatively prosperous and active in local government affairs. George's older brothers all went on to be professionals, including Thomas, Jr., who graduated from West Point in 1856 and later attained the rank of brigadier general in the Commissary Department. This might suggest that George was ordained to be a great military man, but that was not the case. As a boy, Crook did not seem to stand out much at all, "he was not addicted to books and less inclined to higher education than his brothers."¹

Growing up, he was described as, "a farmer's boy, slow to learn, but what he did learn was surely his. He was older, somewhat, than his comrades, and was good natured, stolid, and was like a big Newfoundland dog amongst a lot of puppies. He would never permit injustice, or bullying of smaller boys."² When Congressman Robert P. Schenck, representing the Third Congressional District of Ohio, exhausted his search for a qualified candidate to nominate for appointment he turned to Thomas Crook, George's father, who was a respected Whig farmer and asked if he had, "a spare boy he'd like to send off to West Point."³ Thomas sent George to meet the Congressman and when asked if he thought he could handle the requirements of the military academy George simply

replied that he would try. After some additional preparatory schooling at the Dayton Academy, Representative Schenck nominated George Crook for appointment to the United States Military Academy in March 1848.

Cadet Crook's experience at West Point was utterly non-descript. He remained near the bottom of his class his entire tenure at the academy. His name is almost conspicuously absent from the post order and letter books and from the writings of his classmates, except for his fellow cadet, Philip Sheridan. Crook's friendship with Sheridan seems to be his only relationship of import forged at West Point.⁴

Upon graduation, the Army assigned Crook to Company F, Fourth Infantry, Department of the Pacific, in San Francisco, California. For Crook, who spent his entire life in Ohio, save for his years at West Point, and nothing in his upbringing or education would predict the intellectual curiosity or cultural understanding he would display almost immediately in his development as an officer.

Crook and three of his classmates boarded a steamer in November 1852, from New York bound for San Francisco. The trip initially did not go well for Crook, "so great was my aging during the sea sickness that I was indifferent to life, and cared but little whether the vessel went to the bottom or not."⁵ Crook's recounting of the journey in his autobiography offers insight into his developing world view. He spends pages discussing how the vegetation, wildlife, terrain, climate, and natives, "were all so different from anything I had ever seen before that I was constantly on the alert for something new or unexpected, and I was so wrought up that it was an easy matter for me to believe even in the marvelous."⁶ The trip to traverse the isthmus was difficult consisting of multiple steamer rides, crossing Lake Nicaragua, and a twelve-mile mule ride through difficult and

muddy terrain to reach San Juan Del Sur on the Pacific Ocean. Although the Pacific was much smoother than the Atlantic, Crook was still, “sick all the way.”⁷

What Crook saw when he reached San Francisco amazed him. “Everything was so different from what I had been accustomed to that it was hard to realize I was in the United States. People had flocked here from all parts of the world; all nationalities were represented there. Sentiments and ideas were so liberal and expanded that they were almost beyond bounds.”⁸

Unfortunately for Crook, what he found when he reported to his unit amazed him just as much. His post was at Benicia Barracks on the north side of the bay. When he arrived from San Francisco, his first duty was to fill the ranks in a funeral detail for an officer who drank himself to death.⁹ In fact, except for a couple of officers, “not a day passed but what these officers were drunk at least once, and mostly until the wee hours in the morning. I never had seen such gambling or carousing before or since.”¹⁰ The barracks was occupied by multiple companies from the Sixth Infantry so not all the companies from the Fourth could be accommodated. Crook repeatedly asked to join his company, which was at a camp nearby, but his commander was in no rush to send him to his unit.

Finally, to the excitement of Crook in January 1853, Company B and F attached to the command of Brevet Lieutenant Colonel R. C. Buchanan to establish a post at Humboldt Bay,¹¹ approximately 220 miles up the coast from San Francisco. The Lieutenant Colonel picked the site for the post and the men proceed to their work. While the duty of establishing the post was relatively innocuous and uneventful, a few things

began to shape Crook's view of Army leadership and the complexities of fighting Indians on the frontier.

He was becoming exceedingly discouraged with the Army, in general, and his leaders specifically. In Crook's view his, "impressions of the army were not favorable. Most of the customs and habits that I witnessed were not calculated to impress one's morals or usefulness. Most of the commanding officers were petty tyrants . . . They lost no opportunities to snub those under them, and prided themselves in saying disagreeable things."¹² He considered many of the officers he encountered to be selfish, self-important, and worse yet, out of touch with the realities facing them. They limited themselves to being the masters of their small fiefdoms, with no desire to expand their outlook or encourage their subordinates to grow.

Crook's view of his commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel Buchanan was that he allowed, "no subordinate to make suggestions unasked, and told me, on one occasion, never to take the suggestion of a non-commissioned officer but go ahead and do my own way, even if I knew I was wrong. It was clear he must have followed this principle, judging from the number of mistakes he made."¹³ Crook made every attempt to avoid his commander while at Fort Humboldt, but unfortunately, he was appointed as his adjutant.

Crook faced, head on, the dichotomous Army of the time. Just a few years removed from the Mexican War, the Army had proved its worth. It soundly defeated the Mexican Army in the nation's first thoroughly decisive war victory. However, the post-war Army now offered difficult frontier duty, poor pay, and living conditions. The work was thankless and with personnel drawdowns, advancement was nearly non-existent. Unlike in today's military, there were no retirement benefits for career officers, meaning

many stayed long past their usefulness, blocking the path for younger better performing men. In the view of Utley, “[t]he officer corps exhibited contrasts of competence and incompetence, youth and age, energy and lethargy. On the one hand there were the vigorous and ambitious young line officers glorying in the traditions of professionalism so dramatically established on the battlefields of Mexico and striving to perpetuate them in the dismal little forts of the West.”¹⁴

While working on Fort Humboldt, Crook learned the true nature of the challenges of the Indian Problem. There was a small band of Indians, the first Crook had seen, and that lived on different parts of the bay. He describes them as small, sickly looking, and overall obviously harmless, surviving mostly on fish.¹⁵ However, another local tribe, the Bald Mountain Indians, was a hostile tribe, which killed a few white settlers. After becoming outraged at the depredations committed by the Bald Mountain Indians, “the whites became so incensed at the outrages . . . that some thought those in the bay were in collusion with those in the mountains, so one night a lot of citizens assembled and massacred a number of these poor defenseless beings . . . Some of the local newspapers lauded this, one of the most fiendish acts that has ever disgraced civilization.”¹⁶



Figure 1. Rogue and Pit River Campaigns, 1855-1857

Source: Created by author using D-maps, “United States of America,” accessed May 6, 2017, http://d-maps.com/pays.php?num_pay=138&lang=en.

The rest of Crook’s time at Fort Humboldt was uneventful, leading a few quiet surveying parties. In October 1853, now promoted to full Second Lieutenant, Crook reported to E Company garrisoned at Fort Jones¹⁷ near Yreka, California. The Rogue River Indians were in open hostilities, so Crook was anxious to join his company. On his trip, he went through the heart of California mining country and saw firsthand the

unconstrained energy of the mining towns and the gamblers, speculators, and hustlers that they harbored.

Once at Fort Jones, Crook attempted to understand the conditions he now found himself in. As was quickly becoming the rule and not the exception, he was not fond of the leadership style of his senior officers. The commandant at Fort Jones, in charge of the two companies there, was Brevet Major, G. W. Patten. From Crook's description, it seems Major Patten may have had Tourette Syndrome. "He would make such grimaces, and precede most every word by 'He! He! Be Jesus Christ,' (or 'God')." ¹⁸ Pompousness and irritability exacerbated these obvious communications problems.

Shortly after Crook arrived at Fort Jones, there was a report that Indians killed four local white men who were attempting to recover stolen horses. What followed, had it not turned tragic, would be a comedy of errors, which Crook was finding to be the norm. This adventure would give Crook an up-close perspective on the competing and often conflicting priorities the Army faced when dealing with the "Indian problem." ¹⁹ The soldiers were in the unenviable position of being buffers between the natives and settlers, continually putting them in dilemmas, which had no good outcomes. Complicating matters were the volunteer militias, which often served only to agitate relations with the Indians. The regulars often had to include the volunteers in their expeditions which proved challenging. The militias were not always operating with the same objectives as the Army; the militias were generally seeking retribution or vengeance, while the regulars were trying to maintain the peace and enforce justice. Although, it seemed justice was only a one-way street, Indians must be accountable for crimes against whites, but whites were not accountable for crimes against Indians. "It was of no infrequent occurrence for

an Indian to be shot down in cold blood, or a squaw to be raped by some brute. Such a thing as a white man being punished for outraging an Indian was unheard of.”²⁰

Crook’s company struck out under the command of Captain Henry M. Judah. A company of volunteers, under the command of Captain Greiger, joined them. Captain Judah arranged the formation into an advance guard, main body, and rear guard, with Crook in charge of the advance party, First Lieutenant John C. Bonnycastle headed the main body, and Captain Greiger and his volunteers comprised the rear guard. Captain Judah planned to move between elements ensuring they maintained contact with each other. Not only was the ground covered with snow, soon after setting out, they experienced white out conditions. According to Crook, “the snow seemed to fall in a mass.”²¹

Riding mules, the soldiers struggled to cover ground and maintain contact within their formation. As night fell, the advance guard made camp near a stream about four miles from a cave where the Indians were hiding. The main body soon came into camp and the soldiers began to bed down. They had not seen or heard from the rear guard and Captain Judah for hours. As the night went on Lieutenants Crook and Bonnycastle began to worry. They asked a volunteer to back track and locate the rear guard. A regular and a militiaman volunteered, and they rode their mules and disappeared into the still falling snow.

Shortly after they rode off, the volunteer came running back to the camp without his mule, rustling through the bush. All the men gathered around him to hear what the man had to say. Crook recounts this in his autobiography, “he gasped that the Indians had massacred all the rear guard. He could hear them exulting on their victory.”²²

Lieutenant Bonnycastle, being the senior of the two and now seriously concerned about the rest of the unit, ordered Crook to immediately take a few men and lead the advance party back down the trail. Bonnycastle gathered the rest of the men and followed with the main body. It was not long before Crook's worst fears were most surely realized as he heard, "a terrible noise ahead."²³ However, instead of the commotion coming from Indians in celebration of the slaughter, it was the rear guard, drunk, including Captain Judah, strung out along the trail for miles. It took hours for the men to get all the stragglers into camp and bedded down. Captain Judah was so drunk he could not dismount his mule without assistance. To add insult to this farce, when he was finally able to go to sleep, Crook was unable to remove his frozen boots from his feet, so he laid down, feet to the fire to help thaw his feet. Unfortunately, he placed his blanket too close to the fire, and was awoke with his blanket on fire.

With Captain Judah sick, the unit took a day to nurse their hangover, before getting back on the trail of the Indians. About two miles from the cave where the Indians were located, the soldiers found the bodies of the four white men killed by the Indians. Their bodies picked apart by wolves and frozen, "they were a terrible sight."²⁴ They buried the bodies the best way they could and set out for the cave the next morning.

Once they found the cave, they stopped short by about 150 yards to ascertain the situation. The cave was approximately 100 feet up a rock face that Crook estimated to be at about a 45-degree angle. The Indians had barricaded the mouth of the cave with rocks and logs and debris washed down from the bluffs covered the path. Bonnycastle and Crook accessed the position to be nearly impenetrable. The men looked to Captain Judah for orders on how to proceed. Seemingly perplexed by the problem, Captain Judah first

recommended to Captain Greiger that he lead his volunteers up the rock face to attack the cave. Captain Greiger refused. Instead, he took a few of his volunteers to the top of the bluff to see if they could reach the cave from the top. Unfortunately, Captain Greiger peered too far out over the bluff and a bullet from inside the cave struck him in the head, killing him instantly. Captain Greiger was popular with the volunteers and if they were not already angry enough over the death of the four miners, the death of Captain Greiger enraged them.

Captain Judah's position was becoming increasingly more untenable. He viewed a frontal assault as the only course of action they could take. Fortunately for him, he was on the sick report, still ill from the previous days' episode. Therefore, the lieutenants would have to lead the charge. Lieutenant Bonnycastle, surely seething from the dysfunction of the expedition up to this point, conceded. He would lead the charge. However, he told the captain if he survived the attack, he would be preferring charges against him, prompting Judah to quickly rescind his order.

With the cave mouth unreachable from above and now unwilling to order an attack straight ahead, Judah ordered Crook to travel to Fort Lane²⁵ in the Oregon Territory to procure a howitzer. Judah hoped that shelling the Indians might entice them to surrender. It was a two-day journey to Fort Lane. In command of the First U.S. Dragoons at Fort Lane was Captain Andrew Jackson Smith. Upon Crook's arrival at Fort Lane, he briefed the captain on the situation and Smith decided he would accompany Crook with the requested howitzer and a detachment of his dragoons.

Captain Smith, a Pennsylvanian West Pointer, was professional, thoughtful, and decisive. He held what was quickly becoming a common belief in the Army, "whites can

usually be found behind any Indian troubles.”²⁶ On the trip from Fort Lane to the cave, Captain Smith consulted with an informant he trusted to try to get a better assessment of the situation he was leading his men into. As was his instinct, he learned that there was more to the story. Indeed, the Indians killed the white men as part of an ambush. However, the ambush was the culmination of a series of events caused entirely by some ne’er-do-wells from nearby Cottonwood. The settlers found out there were a band of Shasta Indians living outside of town, using the cave as their camp. The settlers struck out for the cave looking to take some of the Indian women and ponies. The settlers ambushed the Indians and killed three men, two women, and three children before fleeing. The Indian leader, Chief Bill, was away at the time of the attack. When he returned, he knew the settlers would come back and he planned to ambush them when they did. In the meantime, the settlers returned to Cottonwood undeterred and proceeded to gather reinforcements. When they headed back to the cave, Chief Bill and his band were ready, killing four men in the ambush, which led to the report that hostile Indians murdered four white settlers. Armed with this version of events, Captain Smith was suspect of the legitimacy of the task before even arriving at the cave.

When Crook returned with the howitzer, as ordered, Captain Judah was still ill and confined to his tent. Captain Smith immediately assumed command. With Captain Greiger dead, the volunteers were out for blood, while Smith appeared to have every intention of deescalating the situation and resolving it as peacefully as possible, especially considering what he learned of the events precipitating the stand-off. Smith ordered two shots from the howitzer. The shots were ineffective, but served two purposes; they placated the volunteers and intimidated the Indians. Chief Bill offered to

surrender and have Captain Smith hear his case. During the parlay, Chief Bill confirmed the events Captain Smith heard from his informant en route. Worried that the volunteers would slaughter the Indians, Smith told Chief Bill to return to the cave, and he would withdraw the troops, according to Crook, “much to the dissatisfaction of the Volunteers, who were anxious to have the Regulars charge the Indians’ stronghold that they might come in for some spoils.”²⁷ Crook was incredulous, the volunteers were not willing to risk a fight, but had no issue berating the regulars for not wanting to engage the Indians.

The volunteer’s outlook seemed to be the prevailing view, which Crook would become all too familiar with over his career, as expressed in a typical newspaper editorial, “Captain Smith drew off and returned to the Rogue River Valley, contrary to the wishes, advice, and urgent solicitations of the volunteers and citizens of Cottonwood generally, thereby virtually acknowledging himself whipped by a small party of Indians and leaving our citizens and their property wholly unprotected from the ruthless and murderous incursions of these savages.”²⁸

Captain Smith and his dragoons returned to Fort Lane, and in Crook’s words, “our part of the grand farce returned to our places of adobe.”²⁹ Upon their return to Fort Jones, Lieutenant Bonnycastle preferred charges against Captain Judah. After what Crook characterizes as begging from Judah, Bonnycastle agreed to withdrawn the charges if Captain Judah would transfer out of the company, which he did, transferring to Fort Humboldt.

While Crook still had not seen any major fighting, the fallout from the Cottonwood incident ended with a set of circumstances which left no one satisfied, either for vengeance, justice, or peace: seven Indians killed (including women and children),

four settlers killed, a militia captain dead (Captain Greiger), Crook's company commander transferring to avoid charges, and the competence and professionalism of Captain Smith (who adjudicated the matter with no further bloodshed) besmirched by the local newspaper. All with no resolution to even the short-term prospects of the local Indians and settlers coexisting in any sort of way.

With Captain Judah gone, Lieutenant Bonnycastle was in command at Fort Jones. Crook and Bonnycastle worked well together. In this short time, Crook learned firsthand how to develop solutions to difficult problems. For the rest of 1854 and into 1855, there was relative calm and peace around Yreka. Bonnycastle was proving to be creative in solving the problems he was facing at Fort Jones. In order to provide protection to Chief Bill's band he would occasionally bring them into Fort Jones, providing them food and clothing, ensuring they would avoid contact with settlers and miners as much as possible. This ultimately served multiple purposes. The Indians trusted the soldiers and became friendly with them, allowing the soldiers to move freely and safely through the area surrounding Fort Jones. Crook, in what would become his way of working with Indians, took full advantage of this.

The nation dramatically undersupplied and undermanned the frontier Army. The Secretary of War, Jefferson Davis, outlined the issue for Congress in his annual report in 1854. The Army's authorized end-strength was 14,216 officers and men; however, the actual end-strength was 10,745, a short-fall of nearly 3,500 men. Congress attempted to address this in August of 1854, by raising pay to encourage enlistments. The shortage of men meant small units spread across difficult terrain, keeping the men fed, clothed, and

supplied was not an easy task. Secretary Davis captured this dilemma, well understood by the competent officers on the frontier:

I regret that it has not been in the power of the department to concentrate the troops in sufficient force to prevent and, in all cases, to punish these disorders. The circumstances of the service have been such, and the want of troops in all sections of the country so great, that the concentration would have exposed portions of the frontier to Indian hostilities without any protection whatever. Every favorable opportunity will be taken to post the troops in commanding positions, from which they can exercise a supervision of the Indian country, and operate to the best advantage. The events of the past year have furnished many examples of the inefficiency of small posts. Our entire loss in the several actions with the Indians during the year has been four officers and sixty-three men killed, and four officers and forty-two men wounded.³⁰

Making matters worse, these small dispersed posts were well outside of the reach of the department headquarters in San Francisco and the boom towns served to inflate prices for required commodities. Better financed miners and loggers needed the same supplies as soldiers. The commissary had only the soldier's allowed rations, of which the soldiers had to pay the original cost, plus transportation, which could exceed their monthly pay. Whether out of curiosity, necessity, or both, Crook's lifelong love of hunting and fishing was born in the Pacific Northwest.

Because of the relationship fostered with Chief Bill and the local Indians by Lieutenant Bonnycastle, Crook became intimately familiar with the local area, learned about the Indians, their culture, language, and way of life, "I was hunting all my leisure time, so I soon became familiar with all the country within reach of the post. I also used to go hunting with the Indians, and in this way learned something of their habits, as well as those of the game."³¹

This ensured not only that the men at Fort Jones were well fed, but Crook became so skilled at hunting he could sell or trade excess game for supplies needed at the fort.

The post physician, Dr. Sorrel would sell the game in Yreka, Crook would pool the resources with Bonnycastle, and they would order ammunition from San Francisco for cheaper than the Army could acquire and deliver it, “the mess was able to declare dividends. For over a year we never had any meat on our table except game.”³²

When the snow started to thaw in the mountain passes in late spring of 1855, the War Department ordered an engineering expedition. The goal of the expedition was to identify possible railroad routes through the Oregon Territory between the Sacramento Valley and the Columbia River, near Portland. Lieutenant Horatio G. Gibson, an artillery officer commanded the escort, of which Lieutenant John B. Hood commanded the cavalry. Crook was the commissary and quartermaster. This duty put Crook in charge of the pack-train, another bit of experience feeding his rapidly expanding expeditionary skill set. The escort contained nearly 100 soldiers, needed in the judgment of the War Department because Indians attacked an earlier expedition through the same. The escort came together at Fort Reading³³ and headed out with the two engineers and two doctors.

The expedition headed up the Sierra Nevada range into northeastern California, home of the Pit River Indians. The Pit River band was known to attack whites, but perhaps the size of the escort scared them off. The expedition knew they were under the watchful eye of the tribe as they noticed smoke signals in the surrounding hills following their movements. While coming down the back side of the mountains, Crook’s old classmate Lieutenant Sheridan rode into camp with two other soldiers to relieve the reassigned Lieutenant Hood.³⁴

Sheridan came in close contact with the Indians on his ride to catch the caravan. He found their trail and followed, soon realizing the Indians were tracking the expedition.

Sheridan was suspicious of their intentions, so when he saw them, he and his men bolted to evade. A high river bank trapped the soldiers and the Indians closed on them.

However, in a friendly gesture, the Indians demonstrated for Sheridan the best way to ford the river and allowed the soldiers to pass. After cresting the first hill past the river banks he found the expedition's camp. It was Sheridan's view the only reason him and his men were not attacked was because the Indians knew how close they were to the main camp, "[i]ts proximity was the influence which had doubtless caused the peaceable conduct of the Indians. Probably the only thing that saved us was their ignorance of our being in their rear, until we stumbled on them almost within sight of the large party under Williamson."³⁵

The Pit River Indians (Achomawi) were in dire straits. Their resentment towards the white man was well-founded, even if not apparently obvious to the Army and settlers. The prospectors traversing their land scared away the game and the miner's pollution of the streams was killing the salmon. They were slowly starving, forcing them to scavenge and loot. When the expedition would break camp, the Indians would quickly pounce upon the abandoned site to salvage any scraps they could. The expedition moved through the Pit River Valley without incident, but things would eventually come to a head with the Achomawi.

Here an interesting dichotomy emerged which speaks to the heart of the Army's emerging struggle. Even as young lieutenants, learning on the job in the frontier Army, Sheridan and Crook had very different outlooks when it came to understanding and dealing with Indians. Crook was inquisitive, interested in understanding the Indian's culture and way of life, and came to recognize the nuance associated with the settlement

of lands Indians roamed, young Sheridan did not share his view. “The Pit River Indians were very hostile at that time, and for many succeeding years their treachery and cruelty brought misfortune and misery to white settlers who ventured their lives in search of home and fortune in the wild and isolated section over which these savages roamed.”³⁶

Nevertheless, the expedition continued without incident and in August, they moved into the Oregon Territory. This part of the territory was home to the Klamath Indians. The tribe lived along lakes and marshes and were timid. When they encountered the soldiers, they would scramble into the bush and make noise in an attempt to intimidate. It did not take long for the Klamath to realize the soldiers had no intentions of attacking and eventually came into the expedition’s camp. The Klamath spoke Chinook, the Pacific Northwest’s regional trade language. Crook was using these opportunities to continue to build an understanding of his environment. He was interested in Indian languages and began conversing with the Klamath and serving as a translator, including working with one of the expedition’s engineers to build a working vocabulary for the local tribe.

As the expedition continued to work north, the simmering tensions in the Pacific Northwest began to boil. Two different outbreaks occurred, the Rogue River Indians to the expedition’s south in northern California and the Yakima in the northern part of the Oregon Territory about a week later. The expedition came across a group of volunteers where they heard rumors of the fighting with the Rogue River Indians. Given the news, the lead engineer on the survey, Lieutenant Williamson, let Lieutenant Gibson and his detachment return to Fort Lane. This left the expedition with only Sheridan and his dragoons as their escort while they proceeded north.

Unbeknownst to the expedition as they continued north, the Yakima had united all the tribes of the Columbia River basin, and were making one last effort to eradicate the white man from their lands. At first, they had some success. Although not coordinated, the Indian uprising covered an expansive territory, with Indians engaged in active hostilities encompassing nearly all of northern California and the Oregon Territory. Given the terrain, lack of lines of communication, and the small Army units spread out across the area, the Army could not mount any sort of unified effort. This resulted in battlefield losses, or at best draws for the Army and prevented them from stopping massacres of settlers and Indians. This was the state of affairs when the expedition arrived at Fort Vancouver.³⁷ Here they learned the details of the fighting, which for the most part they had been oblivious to. This information coming to light for the expedition, Lieutenant Abbott, now the lead engineer, asked the Commanding Officer of Fort Vancouver, Major Gabriel Rains, for more troops to escort his expedition on their return trip south. Given the circumstances, including a significant defeat approximately a week earlier, Major Rains needed all the men he could get. He did not provide the expedition with more troops, and instead he commandeered Lieutenant Sheridan and the dragoons to augment his forces. This left Abbott with exactly one fighting man left in his expedition, Lieutenant Crook.³⁸

The now much smaller survey party headed south to return to Fort Reading. Not long after leaving Fort Vancouver, the expedition joined a company of Oregon militia also headed south to join regular forces led by Captain Andrew Smith. The march did not encounter any fighting; however, Crook had to suffer more volunteer buffoonery. Once they reached Captain Smith's camp, they detached and continued the trip south. On the

trail, the small party came across the scars of the war that was raging. They discovered multiple ruins of camps and towns, “we passed the smoldering ruins of several houses that had been burned by the Indians, most of the inhabitants killed, and in one instance a family had been burned, cattle and hogs had been shot down by Indians.”³⁹

Crook and Abbot made it unmolested to Yreka and were planning on a short stop at Fort Jones before finishing the trip to Fort Reading to officially conclude the expedition. Much to Crook’s dismay, on the trail he ran into Captain Judah, now back in command at Fort Jones. Captain Judah was marching with his men north to support Captain Smith in putting down the Rogue River Indians. Judah was not happy with Crook’s long absence.

Chief among the reasons was that Judah had to serve as his own quartermaster and commissary, a duty he had neither the interest nor aptitude to accomplish. Judah ordered Crook to return to Fort Jones instead of completing the expedition through the Sacramento River Valley. This bothered Crook for two reasons. He did not get to finish the expedition with Abbot, or get to participate in the fighting. However, the quest for the hostile Indians became fruitless as the winter of 1855 set in and Captain Judah soon returned.

Unfortunately, the winter did not stop settlers and Indians from attacking each other, with atrocities on both sides. Not all the Rogue River bands were hostile, but this mattered little to the settlers. At various points during the winter, Captain Judah opened the fort to peaceful Indians to protect them from vengeful settlers. With spring approaching and the hatred for the Indians reaching a fevered pitch, Judah ordered Crook

to take the company and march to Fort Lane to join Captain Smith for the upcoming spring offensive.

In the meantime, the superintendent of Indian affairs in Oregon decided to relocate the peaceful bands from their reservation on the south end of the Willamette Valley to the northwest coast 250 miles away. This group of Indians had already been subject to a number of attacks by the settlers and keeping them separated was becoming an impossible task. The situation being untenable for both the Indians and the settlers, the move was an attempt to better control and protect the Indians. The local Indian agent requested a military escort from Captain Smith to ensure the safe movement of the Indians. Smith assigned an escort, which included Crook, with the instructions that once they reached the upper end of the Umpqua Valley, most of the escort (including Crook) would return to prepare for the offensive, while a small group would accompany the Indians all the way to their new reservation.

Most of the approximately 400 Indians were old and ill, women, and children. Crook later became well acquainted with Indian removal, but this was his first experience, one that undoubtedly made an indelible impression on him. The Indians were in a terrible state, most with no shoes and some with almost no clothing. Crook observed, “[t]hese Indians were loath to leave their country and go to a land they knew nothing of. There was great weeping and wailing when the time came for them to go. I was to assist in their removal.”⁴⁰

Just before Crook was about to head back south to Fort Lane, he saw why the Indian agent requested a military escort for the removal. “Just before I left, one morning as we were going to start, some white men slipped up in the brush, and shot one of the

Indians in cold blood. I followed their trail for several miles, but had to give up the pursuit as useless.”⁴¹ Eight Indians died on the twenty-three day, nearly 250-mile march through the tail end of the winter.⁴²

When Crook returned to Fort Lane to join Captain Smith and prepare for the offensive against the Rogue River Indians he fell seriously ill. He had rheumatism in his left shoulder and a severe case of erysipelas, which caused damage to the use of his arm, which he never fully recovered. Therefore, for the second time, Crook would miss the fight. Lieutenant N. B. Sweitzer replaced Crook and Captain Smith moved out to pursue the hostile Indians. It would take Crook nearly a month to recover, including having to wean himself off morphine, which he relied on heavily while he was ill.

On the mend, Crook joined a company of the Third Artillery headed out to join Captain Smith. While the reinforcements were on the march, Smith and his men were in a two-day standoff, which was not going in their favor against the last of Rogue River Indians. Smith and his forces, isolated on a hill, found themselves trapped and surrounded, outnumbered and tired. They prepared for their last stand; however, just in time, troops led by Crook’s old commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel Buchanan arrived and attacked the Indians from behind while they were making their charge. Caught between Smith and Buchanan, the surviving Indians scattered and subsequently surrendered, but not before inflicting heavy casualties, killing two-thirds of Crook’s company including his replacement, Lieutenant Sweitzer.⁴³

Crook arrived a couple of days after the battle and had experienced no fighting on the way. He and the company of the Third Artillery did however round up women and children hiding in the woods waiting for the outcome of the fighting. The Second Rogue

River War was over, resulting in the forced removal of 1,200 Indians to the Grand Ronde Reservation in northwest Oregon.⁴⁴

Crook spent the rest of the year at Fort Lane under the command of Captain Smith until, in March 1857, the Army promoted Crook to First Lieutenant. With the promotion, Crook transferred to Fort Jones and, much to his displeasure, back to the command of Captain Judah. With the Rogue River Indians gone, there was quiet in southern Oregon. However, during the winter a conflict with the Pit River Indians in northeastern California had come to a head. Crook had traversed their lands with no issue during the Williamson-Abbot expedition, but since then a series of events escalated tensions into full blown hostilities.

A businessman named Lockhart built two ferry crossings in Pit River country to help support the growing movement of settlers. This increase in activity through the Pit River Valley set the conditions for what was to come next. As is usually the case, the details are difficult to verify, but Lockhart and some of his employees murdered and raped several Indians in retaliation for an Indian who stole a box of matches. The Pit River Indians bided their time and waited until winter, when most of the white settlers left the valley until the spring. When winter came, the Indians took their revenge. They burned all the buildings, destroyed the ferry crossings, stole or killed all the livestock, and killed the five people wintering in the village. Two men traveling through the valley after the incident brought the news to Yreka.

The attack outraged the people of Yreka and they demanded action from Captain Judah. Judah had no desire to go chasing Indians in the snow and delayed a response until he traveled to San Francisco to get official word. His orders were to have the Indians turn

over the perpetrators of the slaughter to the proper authorities or be chastised, with the intent to have the valley secured before settlers started through the valley again during the summer.

Finally, in mid-May, Captain Judah set out with two companies. There were still significant snow drifts in the mountains which would harden overnight and turn to mush during the day, “[d]uring the early morning this snow was sufficiently hard to bear our wagons, but later it would become so soft that the wheels would go down until further progress was arrested by the beds.”⁴⁵ In addition, while Crook was becoming fond of mule trains from his work as quartermaster and his expeditions, he recognized that the sometimes impetuous pack animal was not always the best solution for every problem on the frontier. Judah had the unit mounted on mules with improper saddles and riggings. “It was as good as a circus to see us when we left Fort Jones. Many of our men were drunk, including our commander. Many of the mules were wild, and had not been accustomed to being ridden, while the soldiers generally were poor riders. The air was full of soldiers after the command was given to mount, and for the next two days stragglers were still overtaking the command.”⁴⁶

Once the command reached the Pit River Valley, Crook quickly learned lessons that would help shape his understanding of Indian fighting. The terrain was immediately a problem and the Indians were masters of using it to their advantage. Because of the melting snow, the river watersheds became giant marshes where the water was a foot or two deep with high and thick vegetation. The troops could see the Indians all around them, their dark hair standing out against the vegetation, but they were never able to get

close to them. When the soldiers would wade into the marshes to track the Indians down, they would simply fade away, their tracks covered by the brush and the water.

Captain Judah led the men through the valley for a few days. The troops become frustrated with their inability to find the hostile Indians when Judah thought he caught a break. From a ridge, the command spotted a small village and there appeared to be movement in and around the wickiups.⁴⁷ Crook knew it was just a flock of crows roaming about the deserted village but decided not to intervene, “I saw perfectly plainly what it was, but not being asked, I ventured no suggestions, and there was not the best of terms between us, for I had seen enough of him to realize fully what an unmitigated fraud he was.”⁴⁸

Judah ordered the men to charge the village over rough ground and still mounted improperly on the unbroken mules. When they reached the village, it was clear the Indians abandoned it months prior. “It was as good as a circus to look back over the field he crossed to see . . . riderless mules running in all directions, men coming, limping, some with their guns, but others carrying their saddles. Capt. Judah had that look of cool impudence which he was such a master of, and I could never make up my mind whether he knew better or not.”⁴⁹

For some reason, maybe embarrassment, boredom, imprudence, or perhaps some combination, after this last fiasco, Captain Judah decided to head back to Fort Jones.⁵⁰ Judah’s lack of desire to complete his mission ended up being opportunity Crook was looking for. Judah left Crook and a small detachment of men in the valley while most of the command headed back to Fort Jones. Judah reported to San Francisco that there were no Indians in the surrounding country and Crook’s orders were to protect the road for

travelers between Shasta and Yreka, the ferry crossing, and scout the surrounding area as required until he received new orders.

Crook, “fully realized the situation, and knew that there were plenty of Indians, and that my only show was to find where the Indians were, without their knowledge, and to attack them by surprise.”⁵¹ Not only were there plenty of Indians, but Crook understood they were watching the troops all the time. Unlike the methods used by Captain Judah, Crook would use this to his advantage. Crook knew the Indians would see Judah leaving the valley with most of his troops and, “they would be off their guard.”⁵²

Crook’s first step was to smartly reconnoiter the areas surrounding his camp. He would slip out of camp at night so Indian look-outs could not see them. Crook would do so in small parties, sometimes taking only two or three men, making it difficult for the Indians to detect them, let alone track them. This was not without frustration. On a few occasions, Crook would locate a small village only to return with his company a day or two later to find it abandoned. Worse yet, there were instances when he and his company would lose contact with each other in the darkness and he was unable to consolidate them and reach their objective.

The benefit to the prodigious scouting Crook conducted was that when he found a recently deserted village he knew he was close and knew the trail network leading out of that site. On one such occasion, after finding empty dwellings, Crook had his company muster behind a ridge, while he followed a nearby trail he had discovered previously. “I had not proceeded far before I saw a squaw track which had just been made. It had doubled on its track, and was on the run, evidently having either seen me or the

command . . . I soon saw several other tracks all running in the same direction, and also saw a lot of plunder abandoned by them. Directly saw some buck tracks.”⁵³

Crook caught their trail and was at a full gallop. “Soon I saw the Indians running ahead of me. I rode up to a buck, dismounted, and wounded him, and remounted, and killed him with my pistol. Just then the Indians rose up all about me, and came towards me with frightful yells, letting fly a shower of arrows at me . . . I thought discretion the better part of valor, so I put spurs to my horse, and ran out of the only opening left.”⁵⁴ When he reached his men and doubled back, the Indians had fled. All that was left was the man he killed and an old woman mourning. They followed the trail for a bit before it scattered and Crook abandoned pursuit. He succinctly summed this incident up in his autobiography, “[t]his was my first Indian.”⁵⁵

This was the first skirmish in the campaign Crook and his men waged in the Pit River Valley in the summer of 1857. In the next battle, a few days later, Crook was seriously injured when he was struck with an arrow in his hip. The arrow was presumably poisoned with rattlesnake venom (a common practice at the time). The infection was so bad, Crook hesitantly sent for the unit physician at Fort Jones. He was worried Captain Judah would relieve him or bring him back to Fort Jones on the news of his injury, but luckily for Crook, Judah sent not just the doctor, but twenty-five men as reinforcements for Crook. By the time the doctor arrived, Crook had mostly fought off the infection and the doctor decided to leave the arrow in. Crook was ready to ride in about two weeks.⁵⁶

Back in the saddle, he decided to doggedly track the Indians and fight them on his terms, not theirs. Not all battles were decisive victories, and he often came up empty-handed after following their trail through the wilderness, but by keeping the Indians on

the run, he was able to maintain the initiative. When the Indians did slip away, Crook did not see this as failure. He viewed these instances as building upon his knowledge of the area, identifying more places the Indians liked to camp and exposing more of the trail network they used to navigate the wilderness.

Bolstered by the reinforcements, Crook aggressively campaigned through the valley. His approach to finding and fixing the Indians was to use small scouting parties, while obscuring the movement of his main body. He routinely conducted larger movements at night. When forced to march during the day he would leave his men behind a bluff or in the tree line to obscure his intentions and the size of his forces. He always assumed the Indians were watching his movements and used this to his advantage. “I discovered where an Indian had been watching us, so next morning I ascended the mountain in the direction of my previous day’s march, but instead of crossing the range when I got to the summit, I turned southward, and marched parallel to my march of yesterday.”⁵⁷

The doubling back took two days, but it gave Crook an advantage worth exponentially more than the two days of march it cost him. Crook and his men sat perched on the side of the mountain, able to survey the entire valley, but the key was that the Indians thought they were safe, their scouts watched Crook lead his column out of the valley. They could relax, even if only temporarily, and let their guard down until they saw the troops march back into the valley. Crook forbade fires during the day as not give away their positions with the smoke. His plan and patience bore fruit when they spotted smoke a few miles off.

The men would set off on foot at dusk, leaving their mounts and a few guards in camp. When they found the village, Crook divided his men into three squads, two to flank the Indians and drive them into Crook's squad charging into the fleeing enemy. This maneuver caught the Indians completely by surprise and the panic was palpable as recounted by Crook:

[w]e met the Indians piling out of the rancheria, running from the attack of the other two parties. They were all yelling, women, children, and all. Bucks were imitating wild beast "war whoops," and a worse pandemonium I never saw before or since. We met them face to face, so close that we could see the whites of each other's eyes. The yelling and screeching and all taken together made my hair fairly stand on end. We killed a great many, and after the main fight was over, we hunted some reserved ground that we knew had Indians hidden. By deploying as skirmishers, and shooting them as they broke cover, we got them.⁵⁸

The rest of the summer proceeded much like this until they completely subdued the Pit River Indians. By September, Crook and his men returned to Fort Jones. Reflecting on the events of the summer and the successful defeat of the Pit River Indians Crook noted, "[t]hese Indians were noted all over the Pacific Coast as being amongst the very worst. They had a reputation of being treacherous, warlike, fierce, and wily. They had killed a great many whites . . . Several expeditions had been made against them, with commands much larger than mine, but this was the first time they were ever subdued."⁵⁹

Crook was so successful, that San Francisco began to take notice and captains in the field began requesting his transfer to their commands. Loath to return to Fort Jones and Captain Judah, Crook facilitated a dispute between Judah and Captain John Gardiner of the First Dragoons, operating in the northern area of Pit River country. Crook wanted to remain in the field and when Judah threatened to charge Crook for not returning to Fort Jones as ordered, Gardiner intervened. The case made its way to San Francisco, before

the Commanding General settled the matter by dismissing the charges and ordering Crook's company attached to Captain Gardiner.⁶⁰

Crook had made a name for himself. He recognized that a conventional Army's strengths—overwhelming force and numbers, horses, and rifles and howitzers—were not always useful against Indians. Standard Army formations did not work on some of the most difficult terrain in North America and close quarters combat requiring the element of surprise was critical, “[t]he only way I can account for the few casualties I sustained was from the fact that we invariably charged right in their midst, and confused them, and had them miss me more than once at no greater than ten feet, whereas they could hit man every time at sixty yards when not under excitement.”⁶¹ He also learned that to track and defeat the Indians, he had to think like them, be among them, and become familiar with the areas where they lived and hunted.

He was developing an appreciation, if not always a thorough understanding, of the Indian's hunter-warrior culture. He studied them for practical warfighting reasons and knew his contemporaries were making a mistake for not doing the same, “[i]t is an easy matter for anyone to see the salient points of Indian character, namely that they are filthy, odiferous, treacherous, ungrateful, pitiless, cruel, and lazy. But it is the fewest who ever get beyond this, and see the other side, which, I must admit, is small, and almost latent.”⁶²

The historian Robert Utley summed up the frontier Army's dilemma:

[a] vast and inhospitable terrain demanded an army that could live off the country in the Indian manner or a logistical system so supremely developed as to permit operations not dependent on the resources of the country. A highly mobile enemy skilled in guerilla tactics demanded either a highly mobile counterguerrilla force

or a heavy defensive army large enough to erect an impenetrable shield around every settlement and travel route in the West.⁶³

Young Crook's trials in the Pacific Northwest demonstrated that he learned this quickly and already had keen understanding of this dilemma.

At the end of the summer, when Crook and his company marched north to join Captain Gardiner for a campaign in the Oregon Territory against the Klamath Indians.

The Sacramento Union wrote in the fall of 1857:

Already he has induced a number [of Indians] to come in and sue for peace and it is expected that what remains of the tribe will surrender. He has pursued them into their rugged mountain fastness, through brakes and tules, and routed them with great loss, on the part of the Indians: and the severe lesson—the first that they have ever received—has taught them that a peace is worth keeping. It is believed that Lt. Crook's small command has killed as many Indians in the present campaign, as were killed . . . on Rogue River in 1856, and he merits a like honorable recognition.⁶⁴

In stark contrast to the public opinion of Captain Smith only a few years earlier, Crook and his men rode out of the valley as heroes.

Soon, the frontier Army would head back east to fight their Big War, but the frontier was the birthplace of Crook as an Irregular Warfare practitioner. The Mexican and Civil War interwar period provided young officers not just tremendous challenges, but also, unparalleled opportunity. The austerity of the frontier, both physical and financial, forced the Army's young officer corps to adapt to the realities they faced. Crook succeeded not because the Army prepared him any better than any other officer, but because he recognized the only real solutions required a shift in thinking. This was not the Army West Point prepared newly commissioned officers to lead.⁶⁵ It was a police force, not a field Army, tasked with protecting peaceful Indians, fighting hostile Indians, and constantly attempting to discern between the two.

This crucible gave Crook an opportunity to work collaboratively with other smart young officers. His experiences with Captain A. J. Smith and Lieutenant Bonnycastle show his willingness to learn from others. Coupled with his obstinacy and dogged determination, this cemented Crook's understanding of the Indian problem, which would help shape the burgeoning American west.

¹ Martin F. Schmitt, ed., *General George Crook, His Autobiography* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1986), xxii.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid., xxiii-xiv.

⁵ Ibid., 3.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid., 6.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., 7. This was the funeral of Major Albert S. Miller, 2nd Infantry, a veteran of the Seminole and Mexican Wars.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Robert W. Frazier, *Forts of the West* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1975), 24. Fort Humboldt was established on a bluff overlooking the bay near Bucksport, which is now part of Eureka. It was abandoned in 1867 and subsequently handed over to the Interior Department in 1870.

¹² Schmitt, 10.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Robert M. Utley, *Frontiersmen in Blue* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1967), 29.

¹⁵ Schmitt, 11. These Indians were the Wiyots, part of the Algonquins of California.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Frazier, 24-25. Fort Jones was established in 1852 in north central California, along the Scott River. It was named for Colonel Robert Jones, Adjutant General of the United States Army, who died in shortly before the fort was built. It was abandoned in 1858 and transferred to the Interior Department in 1870.

¹⁸ Schmitt, 17.

¹⁹ This is the term commonly used to describe the United States handling of the Native American issue in the Nineteenth Century. It is used frequently though out this work, including in direct quotes from source material. The term is used in this work only in that context.

²⁰ Schmitt, 16.

²¹ Ibid., 18.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Paul Magid, *George Crook: From the Redwoods to the Appomattox* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2014), 53.

²⁵ Frazier, 130-131. Fort Lane was established on September 28, 1853 in the Oregon Territory by Captain Andrew J. Smith, 1st U.S. Dragoons. The fort was situated on the Rogue River across from the Rogue River Indian Reservation. The fort was abandoned on September 17, 1856 and transferred to the Interior Department March 25, 1871.

²⁶ Magid, *George Crook: From the Redwoods to the Appomattox*, 54.

²⁷ Schmitt, 20.

²⁸ Magid, *George Crook: From the Redwoods to the Appomattox*, 55, quoted from the Yreka Herald.

²⁹ Schmitt, 20.

³⁰ U.S. House of Representatives, *Report of the Secretary of War 1854*, (Washington, DC: War Department, 1854), 5.

³¹ Schmitt, 21.

³² Ibid., 21.

³³ Frazier, 29. Fort Reading was established in 1852. It was located on a tributary of the Sacramento River near the present-day city of Redding. The post was occupied intermittently until 1867 and abandoned in 1870. The post was restored to public domain in 1881.

³⁴ Schmitt, 22. "This is the last time I ever saw Hood, who afterwards became celebrated in the Confederate service."

³⁵ Philip H. Sheridan, *The Personal Memoirs of P. H. Sheridan* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1992), 23.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Frazier, 176. The Hudson Bay Company built Fort Vancouver in 1824 located near present day Vancouver, across the Columbia River from Portland, Oregon. The United States Army occupied the post in 1849. It was converted to the Vancouver Barracks in 1879 and abandoned in 1947.

³⁸ Magid, *George Crook: From the Redwoods to the Appomattox*, 61-62.

³⁹ Schmitt, 29.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 31.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Magid, *George Crook: From the Redwoods to the Appomattox*, 69.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 69-70.

⁴⁵ Schmitt, 35.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 36.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 37. This is the common name for the mat-covered shelters of the Paiutes and Apaches in Arizona and Nevada. Crook often referred to all Indian dwellings as "wick-a-ups."

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid. Crook seemed to think the main reason for Captain Judah's return to Fort Jones was his anxiousness to return to his new bride.

⁵¹ Ibid., 38.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid., 39.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ William B. Seacrest, *When the Great Spirit Died: The Destruction of the California Indians 1850-1860* (Sanger: CA, Quill Driver Books, 2003), accessed April 24, 2017, https://books.google.com/books?id=2q-Z_dV9yqIC&pg=PA249&dq=when+the+great+spirit+died+crook&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjz9pe0tfbTAhVj6YMKHYAzCWQQ6AEIJzAA#v=onepage&q=when%20the%20great%20spirit%20died%20crook&f=false, 238.

⁵⁷ Schmitt, 43.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 44-45.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 53.

⁶⁰ Magid, *George Crook: From the Redwoods to the Appomattox*, 81-82.

⁶¹ Schmitt, 53.

⁶² Ibid., 69.

⁶³ Utley, *Frontiersmen in Blue*, 9.

⁶⁴ Magid, *George Crook: From the Redwoods to the Appomattox*, 86, quoted from the Sacramento Union, September 1, 1857.

⁶⁵ Andrew J. Birtle, *U.S. Army Counterinsurgency and Counterinsurgency Doctrine 1860-1941* (Washington, DC: Center for Military History, 2011), 63. "Perhaps West Point's greatest omission lay not in the realm of strategy, but in fieldcraft. Officers newly posted to the West often were unequipped to survive on the open plains, arid deserts, and rugged mountains."

CHAPTER 3

A MAN IN THE MIDDLE OF A PRAIRIE DOG TOWN

The more we can kill this year, the less will have to be killed in the next war, for the more I see of these Indians the more convinced I am that they all have to be killed or be maintained as a species of paupers. Their attempts at civilization are simply ridiculous.

— William Tecumseh Sherman, quoted in Robert G. Athearn,
William Tecumseh Sherman and the Settlements of the West

I was in hopes you would continue this war, and then, though I were to kill only one of your warriors while you killed a hundred of my men, you would have to wait for those little people (pointing to the Indian children) to grow up to fill the place of your braves, while I can get any number of soldiers the next day to fill the place of my hundred men. In this way it would not be very long before we would have you all killed off, and then the government would have no more trouble with you.

— Geroge Crook, quoted in Martin Schmitt,
General George Crook, His Autobiography

During the Civil War, with both the Union and the Confederacy needing all the able-bodied men they could find, fighting on the frontier fell into the hands of local volunteer militias. This led to a series of tenuous peace agreements made between the Indians and territorial governments on the frontier, many of which were favorable to the Indians because the militias could not strike decisive military victories forcing the Indians into accepting terms. In many ways, this emboldened the Indians, who were marauding with near impunity when the Union Army returned to the frontier. When the Civil War ended and the Army began drawing down, quality Indian fighters were scarce. There were not many experienced frontier fighters before the outbreak of the Civil War. The war having taken its toll, there were even fewer now.

Major General Frederick Steele took command of the Department of the Columbia in early 1866 and shortly thereafter established Boise as its own district headquartered at Fort Boise.¹ The Division of the Pacific formed the district to support operations against Indians operating mostly in eastern Oregon and southern Idaho. Major L. H. Marshall, commander of the Second Battalion, Fourteenth Infantry, commanded the new district. Quickly recognizing that regaining control of the area would be difficult, General Steele requested and received reinforcements. He received three additional companies of cavalry, which he assigned to the Boise district.

Making matters more difficult on the frontier, the attitude towards the Indian problem had shifted. Prior to the Civil War, the Army stood as a buffer and generally a constabulary force, attempting to preserve the peace as best it could on the frontier. After the war, the national mood had changed and so did the Army's approach. They now looked to the, "subjugation and removal of the Indians as an obstacle to expansion into western lands."²

Major Marshall, newly minted commander of the District of Boise, with the cavalry reinforcements, was ready to establish order. In March 1866, Marshall went on an expedition but came up empty, "finding only the unarmed young and old of the Snake tribe."³ In May, Marshall struck out on the trail of the Paiute Indians and led his men into an ambush on the banks of a river. After crossing a fork of the Owyhee River, the Paiute Indians holding the high ground on the river bluff pinned them down. They traded fire for a few hours to no effect and Marshall withdrew. This was an embarrassing defeat. Marshall lost his only howitzer, a raft, and some provisions, as well as a man killed in action.⁴

The tipping point came right about this time, when a band of Paiutes slaughtered approximately fifty to sixty unarmed Chinese miners on their way to a mining claim in Idaho. Reports noted bodies littered the trail for six miles. At the same time the Paiutes, along with Bannocks and Shoshones were raiding livestock, outright stealing or just chasing off sizable herds, which infuriated ranchers. The herds driven off were more than the Indians could have eaten, “the conclusion was that they were a numerous people or valiant eaters.”⁵ The Indians were conducting their own punitive raids.

To make matters worse, when not failing militarily, the soldiers were causing resentment amongst the local population. They were routinely drunk and were stealing or damaging civilian property. Dissatisfied, the Oregon Territorial government mustered a company of militia to stop the Indians. They fared no better. In July, the volunteer company set out to find Indians, but instead fell into a trap. The Indians had the militia surrounded. The volunteers got a runner out to seek help from the regulars, but the Indians dispersed before the soldiers arrived. The militia suffered one dead and two wounded.⁶

Strained civil-military relations made the situation even worse. In October, the Oregon legislature passed a resolution to raise a militia large enough to defend the people of eastern Oregon if the regular Army did not take sufficient action within thirty days. General Steele met with the new governor, George L. Woods, and assured him the Army would establish order, and shortly after began a recruitment drive for the Eighth Cavalry.⁷

General Steele faced with a rapidly deteriorating situation decided to replace Marshall with Crook, who was still on his way to California from the east coast. It was no

accident the Army assigned Crook back to the west. General Halleck, now the commanding general of the Division of the Pacific, was the Army Chief of Staff during the Civil War, where Crook built upon his reputation as an Indian fighter by battling Rebel guerillas in the border states.⁸ “[H]e set out for the Idaho Territory with a well-earned reputation as a seasoned, aggressive, and innovative officer who, his superiors anticipated, would become a force to be reckoned with in the West.”⁹ Crook, having risen to the rank of Brevet Major General and commanding at all levels up to corps, was reverted to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel and placed in command of the Twenty-Third Infantry Regiment, District of Boise, Department of the Columbia, Division of the Pacific, at Fort Boise, Idaho.

When Crook reached Idaho:

Indian affairs in that country could not well have been any worse. That whole country, including Northern California and Nevada, Eastern Oregon and Idaho, up to Montana, you might say was in a stage of siege. Hostile Indians were all over the country, dealing death and destruction everywhere they wished. People were afraid to go outside of their own doors without protection. There was scarcely a day that reports of Indian depredations were not coming in.

The district in which Boise was included was commanded by Col. L. H. Marshall. The feeling against him and many of his officers was very bitter. They were accused of all manner of things. One thing was certain: they had not, nor were they, making headway against the hostile Indians. There was much dissipation amongst a good many officers, and there seemed to be a general apathy amongst them, and indifference to the proper discharge of duty.¹⁰

This list was, by far, not all inclusive. The Army’s worn down mules were barely able to carry the needed loads and the horses were slower and less durable than the Indian’s. In addition, it was not just the Indians the settlers feared. Other whites in the territories, highwaymen and horse thieves, were stealing and looting as well. Crook suspected some

of these men were, “bad men from the south congregated in that country, refugees, deserters, etc.—all against the government.”¹¹

Crook had little time to gain his bearings. Within a week of his arrival, there was an Indian attack only about twenty miles from Boise. “The Indians who had been depredating had gone up the Owyhee River, so I concluded to follow them. Everybody was opposed to it. The weather was inclement, and campaigning was disagreeable.”¹² Winter had set in and morale was low. The troops, having at times aggressively campaigned over the summer with no results to show for their effort were not eager to head out into the winter. The prevailing sentiment seemed to be to stay in the fort and try to stay warm instead of chasing Indians there was no hope of catching. Not even Crook realized what lay ahead. He explained in his autobiography, “I took Capt. Perry’s company of the 1st Cavalry and left with one change of underclothes, toothbrush, etc., and went to investigate matters, intending to be gone a week. But I got interested after the Indians and did not return there again for over two years.”¹³

Crook manned this first expedition with a company full of Civil War cavalry veterans, including the Company Commander, Captain Perry. Along with them were ten Warm Springs Indians scouts with two civilian guides. The use of Indians as scouts, although not a completely new concept, was starting to gain increased popularity. In fact, in the *Report of the Secretary of War 1867*, U. S. Grant enthusiastically recommended expanding their numbers. “Service of Indian scouts employed under act of Congress have been of the greatest value in this military division. Officers are unanimously in favor of increasing the number. As guides and scouts, they have been almost indispensable. At least a thousand could be employed on the Pacific coast.”¹⁴

The expedition set out up the Owyhee River in search of the offending Indians. It did not take long before the troops found their rancheria. Crook, as he had in his previous frontier days and was now the standard tactic, planned to attack the village at dawn. He left a few men in camp and, “attacked them just after daylight, and killed a good many, demoralizing the others. That ended any more depredations from that band.”¹⁵ The official report noted the Indians had been chastised severely. Crook lost one man while the Paiute Chief Howluck, who escaped, lost approximately thirty of his eighty warriors, all his stock, and Crook took nine women and children as prisoners.¹⁶



Figure 2. Snake River War, 1864-1868

Source: Created by author using D-maps, “United States of America,” accessed May 6, 2017, http://d-maps.com/pays.php?num_pay=138&lang=en.

With a quick victory, instead of returning to Boise, Crook wanted to press on. He took his unit north up the Owyhee to the confluence with the Snake River, made camp, and sent for resupply and new scouts from Boise. He received a new group of scouts, referred to as Boise Snakes, a Shoshone Indian scout unit officered by a mixed-blood man named Archie McIntosh. Crook leaned heavily on these scouts and came to trust and respect McIntosh and his Snakes. Shortly after joining Crook, McIntosh proved his worth. After receiving his resupply and rounding up a few more prisoners, Crook wanted to head southeast to Fort Lyon,¹⁷ near Silver City on the Idaho-Oregon border.

The route to Fort Lyon crossed a high plateau which the column was crossing when they found themselves in a driving snowstorm. Crook considered turning back, but McIntosh wanted to push forward, confident he could lead them across the plateau and into the river valley. According to Crook, “[a]t times we couldn’t see fifty yards ahead of us. We had to make a certain point some ten to twelve miles ahead of us, so as to avoid some impassable [canyons] . . . fortunately our guide’s instincts were reliable, more so than the knowledge of any other guide I have ever seen.”¹⁸ They were forced to bivouac on the open plateau overnight and the morning brought no relief from the blizzard. Crook recounted, “[t]he wind blew so hard at times during the day that my weight was insufficient to keep me in the seat, and I would be thrown forward in the pommel of the saddle. The fine snow would sift through my clothes and wet me to the spine.”¹⁹ They pushed through and McIntosh led them down to the Owyhee River as promised, where they continued on the march to Fort Lyon.

When they arrived, Crook found a site all too familiar on the frontier. Captain J. C. Hunt was in command of the First Cavalry. "From appearance and information, the normal condition of the officers there was drunkenness. They didn't seem to do much else but get drunk and lie around doing nothing."²⁰ Crook intended to correct this. He would do so by turning what was a weakness of the frontier Army, too few men, spread across too many forts, covering too big an area, into a strength. "Commands were so small that post commanders placed themselves at risk every time they divided their paltry garrisons for the purpose of providing an escort or conducting a patrol or pursuit."²¹

As described by his biographer Paul Magid, Crook's plan was simple, tireless and dogged pursuit of the Indians, "depriving them of any respite, and engaging them at every opportunity, became the hallmark of his campaign."²² In order to execute this strategy, Crook had to move faster than the Indians he hunted. He and his men needed to keep riding, while the Indians made camp, closing the gap between them. He would have to push through bad weather and traverse difficult terrain, as a means to gain ground and continue the pursuit, or maintain contact. He learned quickly the Indian scouts were a critical first step to this plan. They knew the terrain and the tribes they were chasing. The scouts moved fast, were light, and could extend Crook's reach, while still allowing him to keep sufficient numbers of troops in his column to decisively overwhelm the Indians when they were located.

To keep up with the smaller and more agile bands, Crook needed his men and his stock fresh, rested, and supplied. Previously, the strewn outposts were independent of each other, not working together. The posts were full of soldiers who were frustrated at coming up empty when they chased the Indians, and in short order that frustration would

lead to inaction and drunkenness. Crook changed this. His expedition, unintentionally at first, was the district's awakening and the way he campaigned leveraged all the troops and forts to support his movement.

When he and his men arrived at Fort Lane, they had been on the move for over a month. They fought one large battle, a few small skirmishes, captured over a dozen Indians, and marched through brutal winter conditions, including the two-day blizzard. Therefore, while Captain Hunt and his men at Fort Lane may have been drunk and lazy, they and their horses were fresher than those of Captain Perry.

There were signs of Indians along the Owyhee River on the march into Fort Lane. Crook dispatched the scouts to catch the trail of the Indians and proceeded to follow them out with Captain Hunt and his company, sending Captain Perry and his men back to Boise with the Indian prisoners. This technique allowed Crook and the Army to finally capitalize on their advantages, better weapons, overwhelming numbers, and more supplies, while staying agile and fast, allowing them to stay on the Indians' trail and seize the initiative.

It also had a secondary effect. While Crook's forces stayed fresh new men, the rest of the district was moving and active. Even though these units were not necessarily in direct pursuit of Indians, they were marching on the trails and through the country moving troops and supplies providing presence patrols. The Paiutes were not sure when or where the soldiers might appear on trails, scaring them off, and providing settlers with reassurance. While just a few months earlier the Indians were roving and raiding with impunity, always a step ahead of Army units that were not mutually supportive, it was now the Indians who were on the defensive. Crook continued to press his advantage.

Now on the move with Captain Hunt and his men, it did not take long for Crook's scouts to locate the Indians they detected before they pulled into Fort Lane. When the scouts located the rancheria, they reported to Crook. He and the company staged themselves far enough away not to arouse any suspicion. Just before daybreak, the troops moved to within a couple hundred yards of the village and Crook issued his orders, "I had sent the scouts in the small foothills to pick up any that would try to make their escape in that direction. I gave particular instructions that not a shot was to be fired until we got in amongst the Indians."²³

Perhaps because they were anxious, the men fired as soon as the charge commenced instead of waiting until they closed the distance as ordered. At the same time, Crook's horse became spooked and charged headlong into the midst of the Indians. Crook intended to manage the charge from the back, but now found himself leading the attack. The soldiers caught the Indians completely by surprise. Crook's recounting of the battle is succinct, "[w]e killed all the grown bucks except two who were on the outside of our lines when the attack was made. We gathered up the women and children who had not been killed, and took them into Camp Smith."²⁴

Crook's sterile description did nothing to capture the brutality, confusion, and terror that must have occurred in the battle. In the end, the Crook and his men killed sixty Paiutes, including all the warriors of the band, save two, and a significant number of women and children. The soldiers took thirty prisoners and seized a dozen horses. Crook's forces suffered only one dead and two wounded.²⁵

Crook spent the rest of the winter and into the spring continuing his patrol. There were no major engagements, but the troops routinely came across small bands killing a

handful and capturing dozens. One of the problems with wandering the woods looking for hiding Indians is that sometimes they find you. Embarrassingly, while making camp one night, a group of Indians stole a significant amount of the unit's livestock and the expedition stalled until new mounts could come from California.

In May, when the new animals arrived, Crook commenced patrolling again. While engagements were becoming rarer, the reality was the constant pressure was starting to take a toll on the small bands. The Indians were losing the battle of attrition. Their war parties were getting smaller and smaller, and they were unable to prepare for the following winter by replenishing their food stocks.

Crook spent the summer and fall of 1867 preparing to break the backs of the Indians. He worked to streamline his district; it was no longer the District of Boise. Instead, Crook renamed it the District of the Lakes and he redrew the boundaries of the district to better reflect the area, which contained the Indians he was fighting. He also attempted to close some outposts he thought were not serving the district, but found resistance from civilians and headquarters in Portland. Despite the fact some forts were located where Indians had not attacked in some time, the outcry by local populations proved to be too big an obstacle and General Steele did not allow it. The Army knew there were too many posts but they, "found that it was almost impossible to close a post once it had been established, primarily because forts represented markets and jobs, perks that the local inhabitants and their representatives in Congress were reluctant to give up."²⁶ This issue, identified to Congress more than a decade prior by then Secretary Davis, still hampered the frontier Army.

By this point, Crook had also mastered his use of the scout platoons and his mule trains. He employed the scouts as a screen, sometimes deploying them up to fifty miles ahead of the main force, formed in a column. The pack train followed, numbering at times up to 200 and heavily guarded. To ensure the best possible care of the mules, which were extremely expensive, he used the aparejo packsaddle.²⁷ The aparejo used a grass-filled blanket to ensure the load fit properly on the mule's back, distributing the weight properly, preventing slippage, and protecting the mules from developing sores on their backs. Crook employed experienced civilian packers and ensured he learned each of their names, as well as their individual habits in caring for the mules.

Given the terrain, Crook had no use for the standard Army wagon. It was too cumbersome to maneuver and would frequently break. By shifting entirely to mules, Crook ensured he could carry the supplies and rations needed to sustain his units, providing maximum distance, supporting his long-range raids, and keeping the Indians on the defensive.

As winter set in, Crook knew the end was near. More and more Indians were trickling in to offer their surrender. Many of the Indians knew they could not survive another winter constantly on the run with no supplies and the Army providing no quarter in the territories. Crook intended to destroy the last semblance of resistance and force the Indians to beg for peace.

The winter campaign provided little in the way of tangible results. Two large patrols turned back because of logistical issues exacerbated by terrible winter conditions. The harsh weather crippled Crook's mule trains. Snow a foot and a half deep with a frozen crust on top broke under the animals' hooves with the ice cutting their legs.

Weather fluctuations brought warm rains, which would melt the snow, causing run off and mud pits, sinking the mule train. Then a few days later subzero temperatures froze everything again. This crippled progress and resupply efforts, but Crook was certain the Indians in the country were not faring any better.

This demonstrated the Army's tenuous relationship with winter campaigning. The Indians were most vulnerable during the winter. "Indians tended to neglect ordinary precautions in the winter. With game and grass scarce, they were also less mobile."²⁸ The Army was not using winter operations in any standard form, but aggressive commanders, such as Crook, knew they carried risk, "but the returns could be correspondingly rewarding."²⁹

When the weather cleared in the spring, the roles were now completely reversed. Crook's men raided relentlessly and pursued the Indians persistently. By the middle of 1868, Crook's men were reportedly responsible for killing more than 300 and capturing more than 200 Indians. With most battles reporting dozens of Indian deaths with few or no casualties for the Army.³⁰

Crook's success in the district did not go unnoticed by his superiors. When General Rousseau, the Commanding General of the Department of the Columbia, transferred to Louisiana in March of 1868, the division commander temporarily gave Crook command of the department. Crook delayed getting to Portland for as long as possible to continue the pursuit. Finally, he reported to his headquarters to, in his words, "assume command of the department, and acquaint myself with my new duties,"³¹ but stayed only a couple of days before returning to the fight.

Shortly after Crook's return, a small patrol struck the decisive blow in a seemingly innocuous small skirmish and soundly defeated the prominent Paiute Chief Egan. The Chief was ready to make peace and he put the word out to other chiefs to come in and discuss a unified peace with the whites. Crook knew he had to reach an agreement quickly. He immediately sent to San Francisco to receive the required permission from the division commander to negotiate a peace treaty. Knowing time was of the essence, Crook began before he received the official approval from General Halleck.

As would become Crook's calling card, there would be no negotiations. To make peace, he demanded the Indians throw down their arms and surrender unconditionally and only after having done so would Crook outline terms. Crook made it clear, he was not looking to make peace, but was willing to accept their capitulation. This displeased the Paiutes, but they were war weary and laid down their arms. Complicating matters for Crook was civilian sentiment against making peace. The local population did not want peace, they wanted revenge and a large crowd of civilians gathered around Camp Harney, where the parlay was taking place, vowing to attack the surrendered Indians.

Crook knew the peace would not hold if the settlers began attacking Indians after they surrendered. He convinced the crowd that making peace was the only option:

[m]any were feeling ill over their wrongs at the hands of the Indians, and were necessarily bitter, and had sworn vengeance against all Indians. But when I explained it was to all's interest to have peace so the citizens could develop the country, etc., that I had not made peace out of any friendship for the Indians, they finally agreed not to throw any obstacles in the way by committing any unlawful acts.³²

He also enlisted the help of the Governor of Idaho by writing him a letter advocating for support in this endeavor. Crook convinced the governor to properly develop the territories there must be peace and the Indians must have the opportunity to show their

desire to uphold the peace. The governor had Crook's letter published in the Portland Oregonian to help sway public sentiment.

In his report to the Secretary of War as the department commander, Crook reported, "I am now of the opinion that the Indian war in this country has closed, and there are no hostile Indians extending from the Truckee, in the south, to the northern boundaries of Idaho and Oregon, and that by proper care and management they will remain peaceable."³³

The bloody and brutal Snake River War was over and all credit went to Crook. In his report, the division commander, General Halleck put it succinctly, "[t]he Indian war which has been waged for many years in southern Oregon and Idaho, and the northern parts of California and Nevada, has been conducted with great energy and success by General Crook since he took command in that section of the country . . . Too much praise cannot be given to General Crook for the energy and skill with which he has conducted this war."³⁴ Crook's work in the field was complete and he moved back to Portland, "and from thence commanded the department until relieved by General Canby in 1870. Nothing of note occurred during these two years."³⁵

While Crook's superiors showered him with praise for his outcomes in their reports to the War Department and left him in command of the Department of the Columbia over full colonels and generals for two years, the issue at hand was that his techniques were his and only his. According to Birtle, the Army rapidly gained experience but had not pulled together its breadth of knowledge. These individual experiences, "did not constitute a fixed doctrine for Indian warfare, and it remained for frontier officers to devise innovative solutions to their own Indian problems by

combining conventional forces with slightly unconventional techniques to frame the contest in terms most favorable to the Army.”³⁶

Crook’s experience in the Snake River War tested the techniques he used with small units in California and Oregon before the Civil War. Crook showed they could work at scale, employing multiple companies across a district or a regiment across a department. The once independent, small outposts could support each other, specifically logistically. Perhaps Crook’s greatest innovation was the way he employed Indian scouts. While the practice gained widespread use at the time, Crook took it one step further. He used his Indians not just as scouts and guides, but also as combat auxiliaries, supporting Army units, as well as operating independently when required. This ensured his men had the full insight provided by the scouts and still allowed the Indians to operate like Indians, not soldiers.

As Crook’s reputation as an Indian fighter grew, so too did the challenges he faced. The War Department was, “plagued with an abundance of generals with creditable Civil War records but embarrassing Indian-fighting records.”³⁷ His next assignment would display exactly how short the Army was on credible Indian fighters and be the most difficult test of Crook’s acumen.

¹ Frazier, 42. Established in 1863 on a small creek a mile from the Boise River, the fort was established to protect the trail for settlers to the Oregon Territory. The Army withdrew in 1913 and the post was activated and deactivated multiple times.

² Paul Magid, *The Gray Fox: George Crook and the Indian Wars* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2015), 9.

³ Hubert Howe Bancroft, *The Works of Hubert Howe Bancroft, vol. 30, History of Oregon, vol. 2, 1848-1888* (San Francisco, CA: History Company, 1890), 521, accessed March 20, 2017, <https://ia601703.us.archive.org/25/items/historyoforegon02bancroft/historyoforegon02bancroft.pdf>.

⁴ Bancroft, 520-521.

⁵ Ibid., 522.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid., 526-527.

⁸ During the United States Civil War, Crook took part in and received significant acclaim for his counter-guerilla operations in the eastern border states. While the tactics may have been analogous, the nature of the conflict between the Union and the Confederacy in the Civil War, and the United States' wars against the Native Americans were vastly different. For this reason, this study omits them as beyond its scope. However, reflection and further study on the influence of the Civil War counter-guerilla campaign on the Indian Wars is highly recommended.

⁹ Magid, *The Gray Fox*, xiv.

¹⁰ Schmitt, 142-143.

¹¹ Ibid., 143.

¹² Ibid., 144.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ U.S. House of Representatives, *Report of the Secretary of War 1867* (Washington, DC: War Department, 1867), 30.

¹⁵ Schmitt, 144.

¹⁶ Bancroft, 532-533; U.S. House of Representatives, *Report of the Secretary of War 1867*, 77. Sergeant O'Toole was the lone Army casualty of the battle, "who had fought in twenty-eight battles of the rebellion."

¹⁷ Frazier, 25. Fort Lyon was a base used briefly in 1862. Established on the Mad River near Arcata it was never officially designated a fort by the Army.

¹⁸ Schmitt, 147.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid., 148.

²¹ Birtle, 59.

²² Magid, *The Gray Fox: George Crook and the Indian Wars*, 11.

²³ Schmitt, 148.

²⁴ Ibid., 149.

²⁵ U.S. House of Representatives, *Report of the Secretary of War 1868* (Washington, DC: War Department, 1868), 77.

²⁶ Birtle, 59.

²⁷ Magid, *The Gray Fox: George Crook and the Indian Wars*, 25-26. Mules averaged seventy-five dollars each, while privates made thirteen dollars a month. The arapejo packsaddle came to the attention of the U.S. Army during the Mexican War.

²⁸ Robert M. Utley, *Frontier Regulars* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1973), 50.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid., 180.

³¹ Schmitt, 158.

³² Ibid., 159.

³³ U.S. House of Representatives, *Report of the Secretary of War 1868*, 73.

³⁴ Ibid., 44.

³⁵ Schmitt, 159.

³⁶ Birtle, 67.

³⁷ Utley, *Frontier Regulars*, 181.

CHAPTER 4

APACHERIA

The cost of military establishment in Arizona is out of proportion to its value as part of the public domain.

— William Tecumseh Sherman, quoted in U.S. Office of Indian Affairs,
Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs

We had one war with Mexico to take Arizona, and we should have another to make her take it back.

— William Tecumseh Sherman, quoted in Paul Hutton, *The Apache Wars
The Hunt for Geronimo, the Apache Kid, and the Captive
Boy Who Started the Longest War in American History*

Before Crook gave up command of the Department of the Columbia he served on a Benzine Board¹ in San Francisco. The Army was continuing its post-Civil War draw down and required significant personnel cuts. Washington chose the field officers and the divisions picked the junior officers. This was the Army's chance to clean up the officer ranks and eliminate the drunks and incompetents; a task Crook must have relished.

While he was in San Francisco executing his duties on the board, his division commander, Major General George Thomas, approached Crook and offered him command of the Department of Arizona. He summarily declined and in his usual succinct way explained the decision, "Gen. George H. Thomas, while I was still in command, asked me if I would like to take the command of Arizona. I told him that I was tired of the Indian work, that it only entailed hard work without any corresponding benefits. Besides, the climate in Arizona had such a bad reputation that I feared for my health."²

General Thomas died unexpectedly from a stroke and his replacement, Major General Schofield offered the command to Crook as well. Again, he declined. Adding to

Crook's concern about taking the assignment was that full colonels usually filled department commands. Crook was still a lieutenant colonel and with the draw down, command opportunities were becoming harder and harder to come by. There were approximately forty colonels ahead of Crook waiting for command and he knew that there would be significant resentment towards him from his peers if he advanced past so many senior to him.

The matter however, much to Crook's dismay, would not die. The Arizona governor, Anson P. K. Safford was not happy with the way the current commander, Colonel Stoneman, was handling the problem. Stoneman had lost the confidence of the people of Arizona and its governor. The prevailing sentiment in the territory was that Stoneman did not understand the severity and urgency of the situation, and probably much worse for him in the end, many believed he was too soft on the Apache. Stoneman's sins included moving his headquarters out of Arizona to southern California, providing provisions to the Apache who agreed to quit raiding, and closing several military posts.³

Safford approached Crook while in San Francisco to inquire about his interest in the posting. The governor knew of Crook's success in fighting difficult Indian wars and thought Crook was the right man for the job of bringing the Apache under control. Crook described the interaction by saying the governor, "interviewed me on the same subject in San Francisco. After my telling the substance of what I had said to the others, he assured me that he would not urge the matter in Washington . . . I afterwards learned from himself that he had got the California delegation to see Grant, who was President, and have him assign me over the heads of the Secretary of War and General Sherman, who

both opposed my assignment over the heads of so many who ranked me, as I was then only a Lieutenant-Colonel.”⁴

Crook was now the commander of the Department of Arizona, with the decision coming from the President himself. In an awkward attempt to placate the full colonels Crook had jumped ahead of, the War Department appointed him to the post based on his brevet rank and announced the assignment was only temporary.



Figure 3. Tonto Basin Campaign, 1872-1873

Source: Created by author using D-maps, “United States of America,” accessed May 6, 2017, http://d-maps.com/pays.php?num_pay=138&lang=en.

The Spaniards discovered the southwest corner of the present day United States and called it Apacheria. It was the vast desert area bounded by the Grand Canyon in the north to the Sierra Madre in the south and stretching from the Colorado River in the west to the Rio Grande in the east. There were many tribes, which occupied area, but the dominant peoples were the Apache. Several distinct bands comprised the Apache, known primarily for the area they inhabited and their distinct customs. The Apache refer to themselves in the common language of the Indians of the region, Athapaskan, as *Dine* or *N'de* meaning simply, the people. However, as with most Indians on the frontier, the name that caught on was the name others called them. Most accept that the word Apache is a variation of the Zuni word *apachu* meaning enemy.

There were three major groups of Apaches, which concerned the Army in the southwest. The Mescaleros, including the band known as the Warm Springs Apache, inhabited central and southeastern New Mexico and western Texas. They often roamed well east of the Rio Grande into the plains of northern Texas and present day Oklahoma, as well as northern Mexico. There were also the Chiricahua Apache, which occupied southern Arizona, southern New Mexico, and areas well into northern Mexico. This was the band of the great Apache Chief Cochise. Included in the Chiricahua were the Eastern Chiricahua made up of the Bendonkohes and Chihinne Apache who lived along the Arizona-New Mexico border along the Gila River. Even farther south, in Mexico, were the Nednhi band, commonly referred to as the Southern Chiricahua. Finally, the Tonto Apache or Western Chiricahua, who lived in most of central Arizona, roaming as far north as present day Flagstaff.⁵

An issue that made coordinating the fight against the Apache more difficult was the way the Army divided Apacheria. In 1870, the Army established the Department of Arizona in the Division of the Pacific, and New Mexico and Texas were part of the Division of the Missouri, commanded by Lieutenant General Sheridan. The Tonto Apache were mostly in Arizona and Mescalero were mostly in New Mexico, this command division would prove difficult and cumbersome in the fight against Cochise's Chiricahuas, which straddled both districts and Mexico.⁶

Complicating matters even more was the new Peace Policy initiated by President Grant. High ranking officers hoped that with Grant's election the Indian Bureau would move from the Department of the Interior and return to the War Department, giving the military final say on managing Indians. Grant instead kept the Indian Bureau in the Interior Department. To manage his policy to pacify and civilize the Indian, Grant appointed Quakers and other philanthropists and Christian humanitarians as Indian agents. Indian agents had control over all matters on reservations and the Army could only intercede when requested or given permission by the reservation agent.

Shortly before Crook arrived in Arizona, an event occurred which would shape years of relations with the Apache, and the United States government's approach towards them. Lieutenant Royal Emerson Whitman was in command of Camp Grant, approximately seventy-five miles north of Tucson. Whitman, executing his duties at the camp, encountered the local Apache band, the Aravaipa Apache, led by Chief Eskiminzin. The chief offered to establish peaceful relations and wanted to settle near the camp. Whitman was happy to establish a relationship, but not having the authority to make a deal, requested permission from the department commander, Colonel Stoneman.

While waiting for the approval, Whitman set up the Camp Grant reservation, providing an area for the Aravaipa to live peacefully, under the watchful eye of the soldiers. They gave up their arms, agreed not to raid, and submitted to regular head counts, so Whitman knew the warriors were not slipping out to attack settlers. The Aravaipa cut hay and wood for the soldiers in exchange for their rations.

Whitman's actions contributed to the strained and tenuous civil-military relationship. The nearby residents felt the Army was coddling the Apache, especially while there were some bands that continued to raid. Colonel Stoneman, perhaps beginning to feel the pressure, which would soon lead to his ouster, delayed responding to Whitman's request for six weeks. When Stoneman finally responded, his adjutant informed the lieutenant that the request was not in the proper format and the colonel would take no action on it.

Meanwhile, a vigilante group comprised of five Americans, forty-eight Mexicans, and ninety-two Papagos Indians,⁷ with material aid from some of the more prominent members of the Tucson community, set out for Camp Grant to visit their form of justice on the Apache with whom Lieutenant Whitman had made peace. They left on Friday morning, April 28, traveling mostly at night to avoid detection by Army patrols. Shortly before dawn on Sunday, April 30, the mob reached the village on the Camp Grant reservation and the slaughter ensued.

That Sunday morning a sergeant greeted Whitman carrying a dispatch warning of the mob that left Tucson for the reservation. The sergeant informed Whitman that a small group ambushed and detained him on the trail for several hours. The lieutenant scrambled two of his interpreters to ride to the village and have Eskiminzin bring his people to the

fort. The interpreters returned shortly, informing Whitman that they found the village burned and there was no one left alive. Whitman rushed to the village to witness the carnage for himself.

The final count was 125 dead; all but eight were women and children. Most of the men were out of the village on a hunt and many of the slaughtered Apache died in their wickiups before they could flee. Adding insult to grave injury, the raiding party took several children captive. The fate of most would be slavery in Mexico. Whitman, fearful of Apache retribution did the only thing he could think to make it clear the Army had no part in the massacre; he and his men began burying the bodies of the dead.⁸

John Bourke, who served for many years as Crook's adjutant and is a vital figure in the documentation of the Army's involvement in the west, summed up the events starkly in *On the Border with Crook*, "the fearful scene of bloodshed known as the "Camp Grant Massacre," which can only be referred to—a full description would require a volume of its own." He describes it as, "one of the worst blots in the history of American civilization . . . The incident, one of the saddest and most terrible in our annals, is one over which I would gladly draw a veil."⁹

Many in the west cheered the massacre, while it appalled people back east. The massacre incensed President Grant. This was a direct affront to his peace policy and he would not stand idle. Grant took three steps in quick succession. First, he threatened Governor Safford to hold the perpetrators for the massacre accountable or Grant would declare martial law in Arizona and have the offenders court-martialed.¹⁰ Next, he assigned the first of two Indian Commissioners, Vincent Colyer, to Arizona to make

peace with the Apache and establish a reservation system. Finally, he fired Colonel Stoneman and placed Crook in command of the Department of Arizona.

Well before Crook arrived in Arizona, the Army was conflicted on how to deal with the Apache. In 1867, Major Roger Jones, the Inspector General of the Division of the Pacific, conducted a survey of Arizona. The results were scathing. Major Jones outlined, “an unsatisfactory condition of affairs throughout a considerable portion of Arizona.”¹¹

He provided three recommendations. “The first and most important change which is deemed absolutely essential to any lasting improvement in the general condition of affairs in Arizona, is the organization of the Territory into a separate military department with a commander residing at some central point.”¹² He also recommended that the number of outposts in the territory was detrimental to affecting the Apache. The units were too small to provide any meaningful resistance and they were too far apart to coordinate operations. Last, “is the want of more mounted men. There seems to be to me but one way of bringing about this result, and that is to mount the infantry. This will render them available in the pursuit of Indians, and will be a strong addition to the effective force in the Territory. As footmen, they are of but little service in Indian warfare.”¹³

The division commander agreed with Major Jones’ assessment of the situation in Arizona, but dismissed all of his recommendations in a rebuttal, which was five times as long as the Inspector General’s report. Crook must have been aware of the report, as it appeared in the *Report of the Secretary of War 1867* and matched the strategy he was using at the time in the Snake River War. While the Arizona Territory became its own

district and Colonel Stoneman closed some forts, he never leveraged the benefits of those moves. By establishing his headquarters in southern California instead of Arizona, he made communication more difficult, and he did not leverage the larger units in fewer garrisons for offensive operations.

When Crook arrived in Tucson his goal was to build the best understanding of the situation that he could. He knew all too well how important balancing the civil-military relationship would be. His first call was to the governor, followed by visits with many prominent local officials in Tucson. The most popular recommendation he received was to enlist Mexican scouts to track the Apache. Crook went along, “[f]or want of something better, and from the recommendations of the governor and other prominent men, who said that the Mexicans were the solution...that they knew the country, the habits and mode of Indian warfare.”¹⁴

It is unclear why Crook so easily went away from a practice, which worked so well for him in Oregon and Idaho. Magid adds to Crook’s customarily succinct explanation, “Mexicans had been selected on the dubious recommendation of Tucson’s governing class . . . based upon their performance during the Civil War.”¹⁵ Bourke offers a bit of clarity on the composition of the first scouts and indeed there were Indians among them, “[t]he detachment of scouts made a curious ethnographical collection. There were Navajos, Apaches, Opatas Yaquis, Pueblos, Mexicans, Americans, and half-breeds of any tribe one could name . . . the best that could be summoned together at the time; some were good, and others were good for nothing. They were a fair sample of the driftwood of the Southwest.”¹⁶

It would be incongruous not to assume Crook wanted Apache scouts from the outset. However, despite the governor hand-selecting him, he must have known that tensions in the territory were at such a fevered pitch, that he would not have much leeway from the civilian territorial leadership or the white population. Given the level of distrust between the settlers of Arizona and the Apache, when Crook did hire Apache scouts, he must get it right. The Apache he used would automatically be under suspicion and the highest level of scrutiny. It seems reasonable that Crook hired the scouts to appease the locals in Tucson and stay in their good graces even if only temporarily, but clearly, he had no intention of waging war without enlisting Apache scouts. This would come to fruition quickly as it did not take long for him to find the Apache scouts he wanted.

Crook hired fifty of the recommended scouts and struck out to survey the territory and consult his captains in the field. He marched with six companies to get an up-close look at the terrain, as some parts of the territory had yet to be sufficiently mapped, but also to get a feel for his men and in Bourke's words so the, "officers and men could get acquainted with each other and with the country in which at a later moment they should work in earnest."¹⁷

Rumor had it, especially given the Camp Grant massacre, the President Grant would be looking to make peace, but Crook wanted to test his men and make sure to prepare them for the failure of the peace talks. In addition, Crook wanted to serve notice to the Apache. As with his expeditions in the Pacific Northwest, he knew the Apache were watching the Army's every move. On the march, they spotted small groups of Indians, but they never got close, and there were no battles.

He did have a few peaceful encounters with small groups of Indians. Near Camp Apache, he met with the White Mountain (or Coyotero) Apache. They welcomed Crook, having mostly had good relations with settlers. Crook was skeptical. After all, the counsel he received was nearly unanimous. He could not trust the Apache. However, the White Mountain Apache explained to Crook they were anxious to put themselves on the “white man’s road.” According to Bourke, “Crook’s talk was very plain; a child could have understood every word he said. He told the circle of listening Indians that he had not come to make war, but to avoid it if possible.”¹⁸

This was the opportunity Crook was looking for. He requested the Indians, as a show of good faith, provide him with scouts, which they consented to do. The Apache scouts so impressed Crook and his officers that he immediately dismissed the Mexican scouts, “who had fallen far short of his expectations.”¹⁹ Reinforcing his trustworthiness, Crook insisted on paying the Indian scouts the same as white troops. Despite warnings against using Apache as scouts, in the estimation of noted historian Dan L. Trapp, “Crook had demonstrated his solution to the Apache problem.”²⁰

Crook’s plan to defeat the Apache centered not on winning victories around the edges. He knew he would have to strike at the heart of the Apache, he wanted Cochise himself. He planned to focus his effort on the Chiricahua chief. Although Cochise would later die of natural causes, Crook’s desire to chastise Cochise bordered on obsession. In addition, in the end, Crook was correct, as it was the southern Apache that would hold out to the bitter end.

As many expected, Crook had to cut his march short. He received the word when he reached Camp Verde. “When I received my mail, I discovered from the newspapers

that a Mr. Vincent Colyer had been sent out . . . to interfere with my operations . . . and was going to make peace with the Apache by the grace of God.” Crook’s stance on the peace emissary was clear, “I had no faith in the success of his enterprise, but I was afraid if I continued my operations and he was to fail, I would be charged with interference.” Crook called off his operations immediately and ordered the district, “to furnish Mr. Colyer all assistance within their power in the carrying out of his peace policy.”²¹

One of Colyer’s first moves was to visit Camp Grant and meet with Lieutenant Whitman and Eskiminzin. The Apache leader pleaded with Colyer to return the children stolen during the Camp Grant massacre. Colyer instructed Dr. R. A. Wilbur, the Papago Indian agent to investigate the whereabouts of the missing children so there could be a determination as to their disposition. Costing him what little credibility he might have had with the local population, Colyer officially established the reservation at Camp Grant and placed Whitman in charge as its agent.

The move incensed Crook. One of the few things most people agreed upon, fairly or not, was that Whitman was at fault for the Camp Grant massacre. Either because he should have never established the reservation without authority, was too friendly with the Indians, did not properly protect the Indians, or was too naïve to realize Eskiminzin was making promises to stop warriors from raiding that he could not keep. Crook placed the blame squarely on Whitman. He had such enmity towards Whitman that he later preferred charges against Whitman for drunkenness. Crook’s view was that Whitman had, “deserted his colors and gone over to the “Indian Ring” bag and baggage.”²²

In the eyes of senior officers in the Army, Whitman’s sin was that he exceeded his authority by establishing the reservation and feeding station. Crook was suspicious of

Whitman's motives, assuming he did so to participate in the graft and corruption that centered on running reservations. Whitman's appointment as agent by Colyer only deepened the suspicion. To avert this situation in the future, Crook issued an order forbidding officers from establishing feeding stations without proper authority. The irony, not lost on many of Crook's critics, both then and since, is that Crook did the same thing himself, while waiting for official approval from San Francisco to make peace in the Pacific Northwest.

While Colyer began his work, Crook moved his headquarters from Camp Drum, near Tucson, to Fort Whipple at Prescott and continued his preparations. He kept his packers on retainer so he would not lose them. He upgraded his forts and aimed to prepare his men and improve their moral. He requested a doubling of the soldier's clothing allowance since the environment in Arizona was so hard on boots and uniforms. He also requested more funds to build barracks so the men were not sleeping in tents permanently.

Colyer made peace throughout Arizona and established a reservation system. While most of the Apache had no intention of keeping the agreements made, Colyer was doing the work of implementing a reservation plan where none previously existed. When Colyer's work was complete, he headed to Washington to get presidential approval for his reservation plan. As soon as Colyer left Arizona, Crook immediately complained to the division commander, General Schofield, that Colyer's plan would fail and in a streak of paranoia accused Colyer of attempting to force him into a punitive war against the Apache. Not to be outdone, Colyer attempted to get Crook fired by writing to the Secretary of the Interior and suggesting that keeping Crook as the head of the department

ensured there would be no peace. Much to Colyer's dismay, Crook was not going anywhere.

Shortly after Colyer's departure, in November of 1871, Arizona again became the center of national attention, this time for another massacre. There was an attack on a coach full of white travelers near Wickenburg, a mining town in southwestern Arizona, in which six of the eight passengers died. The event drew attention because one of the dead was Frederick W. Loring, a well-respected journalist from Boston. Newspapers across the country ran the story. As soon as Crook heard the news, he dispatched Captain Charles Meinhold from Fort Whipple to investigate.

The immediate suspects were the Yavapai Apache from the Date Creek Reservation. There was a significant amount of contradictory evidence that suggested that the Yavapai were not to blame. Crook assigned the Date Creek commander, Captain R. F. O'Bierne, to follow-up on Captain Meinhold's investigation. O'Bierne concurred with Meinhold's findings. Given these corroborating investigations, this satisfied Crook that Colyer had not made the peace he promised. Crook hoped he would finally be able to prosecute the war needed to subdue the Apache.²³

The outrage over the Wickenburg Massacre provided the military enough leverage to go on the offensive. The division commanders of the Pacific and the Missouri received their orders; they were to enforce the reservations. All roving bands of Apache were to report and confine themselves to their reservations. Indians who stayed on the reservation would receive rations and protection. The Army would treat those that resisted as hostile and hunt them down.

Crook spent the winter preparing. He gave the Apache until mid-February to comply. Most did not. Instead, they did the exact opposite and went on the offensive themselves. Crook would begin his long-awaited campaign in early March 1872, “[t]hen I was given permission to commence operations against the hostiles, but just as I commenced another embroglio [sic] was placed on me. So I suspended again when General O. O. Howard was sent out, clothed with even greater powers than those given Mr. Colyer.”²⁴

Well regarded, not for his tactical acumen, but for his courage and character, General Howard lost one of his arms in the Civil War and was the recipient of the Medal of Honor. A man of strong faith, nicknamed the “Christian General,” he felt peace with the Indians was a mission from God. Crook’s view of Howard was no different than his view of Colyer, “I was very much amused at the General’s opinion of himself. He told me that he thought the Creator had placed him on earth to be the Moses to the Negro. Having accomplished that mission, he felt satisfied his next mission was with the Indian . . . I was at a loss to make out whether it was his vanity or his cheek that enabled him to hold up his head in this lofty manner.”²⁵

Crook, as he had with Colyer, made it clear to Howard that he would support his peace efforts to the extent of his powers. He did so for the same reason as with Colyer, but Howard brought with him an extra level of authority. Unlike Colyer, Howard was not a civilian, and he out-ranked Crook, a fact Howard not so subtly reminded Crook of on his arrival in Arizona. According to Crook, Howard, “intimated at Yuma that he had the authority to supersede me in command in case he saw fit . . . he did not take advantage of the power granted him, but seemed anxious to have persons under my command espouse

his views as contrary to mine.”²⁶ For Crook, his resentment toward Colyer was one thing. Colyer was a do-gooder sent to interfere. The added element of military oversight, including Howard undermining him with the men in his command, when Crook was hand-picked above many senior ranking officers, rankled him even more. Crook later found out that to entice the officers in Arizona to share opinions in conflict with Crook’s, Howard, “had held out inducements to some of duty East.”²⁷

Crook knew his path was now more difficult. Already balancing the civil-military relationship as best he could, he now had an officer senior to him, on direct orders from the President and with his authority, attempting to make peace in his department. Crook’s manner never betrayed his intentions. While he sought out counsel from nearly anyone who thought they had it to offer, Crook deliberated and formulated his plans alone, always. Crook did not seek attention for himself and this served as a perfect foil for Howard.

For his part, Howard seemed quite fond of Crook. Howard thought Crook peculiar and, “even more reticent than General Grant, carefully keeping all his plans and thoughts to himself.”²⁸ Although seen by Colyer as a warmonger, Howard recognized and admired Crook’s approach to Indians. “He was indeed a favorite with the Indians, and though terrible in his severity when they broke out and made war, and perhaps at all times distrustful of them, yet he believed in keeping his word with an Indian as sacredly as with a white man, and in all his dealings with them he was uniformly just and kind.”²⁹

Howard pressed hard to make peace with the Apache. He traveled throughout Arizona and made treaties with most of the more peaceful Apache tribes. He solidified the reservation system including the establishment of new reservations. Howard

convinced many of the Apache leaders to travel back to Washington to meet the President Grant and seal their peace. The practice of bringing prominent Indians east was designed to overwhelm them, “by the sheer size and might of the United States and dazzled by its technological accomplishments. The Indians would thus lose the heart to fight on against impossible odds, and would also come to envy and then emulate white ways.”³⁰ The value of this has been debated. While many elders returned and spread the word, the tales of the white cities were so fantastic many Indians did not believe them and thought the chiefs were the victims of bad medicine.

With Howard’s peace plan now ratified, the War Department had waited long enough. Officers at the reservations would enforce the peace and General Crook was now free to fight his war. Crook’s offensive was to begin by rounding up the accused perpetrators of the Wickenburg Massacre from the Date Creek Reservation, which went terribly wrong. Crook had the agent at the reservation bring all the Indians in to arrest the suspects. When the soldiers attempted to make arrests, a melee commenced. The soldiers killed a few Indians and the rest fled, including the wanted Indians. Crook, within his rights under the standing orders to apprehend Indians off the reservation began the hunt.

Captain Julius Mason led a company of the Fifth Cavalry out, with Albert Seiber, Crook’s chief of scouts, and eight-six Hualapais scouts. The Yavapais fugitives thought they were safe, hidden in a small group of rancherias deep in the mountains. They were not. The scouts found them easily and Mason commenced the attack at dawn, “killing and good many and demoralizing the rest.”³¹ The unexpected nature of the defeat, as well as its ferocity and completeness, brought the rest of the Yavapais back to the reservation, begging the soldiers to allow them back, unconditionally.³²

This decisive victory emboldened Crook and confirmed what he knew to be true; the Apache would capitulate only once defeated in battle. The division commander, General Schofield, consented to allow Crook to press the attack, but even with the general's endorsement, Crook knew time was of the essence. General Howard had returned from Washington and was in New Mexico, on a mission to make peace with Cochise.³³

Needing to move quickly, Crook dispatched elements of the Fifth Cavalry to enforce the reservations and followed in trail with his headquarters. When he reached Fort Apache he learned, "the Indian people there were very indignant at me, and hinting around that I would soon have my comb cut for transcending my authority, that I had been reported to the Secretary of the Interior . . . I had to leave for Grant before the document arrived . . . as they seemed hostile to me in Washington."³⁴

Crook was certain he could win the war quickly and he gambled his entire career on it. He planned to move his entire Army into the field and avoid official communication from San Francisco and Washington. "I had made up my mind to disobey any order I might receive looking to an interference of the plan which I had adopted, feeling sure if I was successful my disobedience of orders would be forgiven." His confidence came from his preparation. Though no one else knew his plan, he spent a year perfecting it, his men were ready, and so were his scouts, "which I saw as my main dependence. Also, I had been stopped twice from assuming the offensive, and felt if I was again stopped, I would lose my head anyway."³⁵

Crook took his field Army, the Twenty-Third Regiment and elements of the First and Fifth Cavalry, and divided them into independent commands. These commands

would fight continuously and were, “sufficiently large to prevent disaster,” and, “small enough to slip around out of sight of the hostiles.”³⁶ Crook designed the campaign specifically for the winter. While the conditions were harsh for Crook’s men and horses, the elements would be that much more difficult for the Indians on the run. Lack of water would have crippled a summer campaign, but winter snows ensured his columns would have the water needed to sustain the pursuit.

The orders were simple, commanders were to offer peace. If the Indians did not accept, defeat the hostiles quickly and decisively until the last one was dead or captured. Avoid killing women and children. Treat prisoners as well as possible; the Army could use them as scouts later. “No excuse was to be accepted for leaving the trail; if horses played out, the enemy must be followed on foot, and no sacrifice should be left untried to make the campaign short, sharp, and decisive.”³⁷ Finally, Crook told his commanders, “to obey no orders, even from the President of the United States, until I first saw it.”³⁸

Crook moved his headquarters around the rim of the Tonto Basin, skipping from fort to fort. He allowed his commanders to prosecute the fight as needed, but personally oversaw logistics and resupply. They were relentless, as Crook had demanded. The fighting was brutal for the soldiers, but worse, by orders of magnitude for the Apache. Crook’s Army defeated the Tonto Apache of central Arizona by April. His soldiers thoroughly impressed Crook, who was never one to offer glowing compliments. He bragged about the hardships they overcame, the brutal weather conditions, the unforgivable terrain, and when the animals were lame, they carried next to nothing and continued after the enemy on foot, to the ends of the endless Arizona desert.³⁹

Crook would declare victory, “on the seventh day of April, 1863, the last of the Apaches surrendered, with the exception of the Chiricahuas under Cochise, whom General Howard had taken under his wing. Had it not been for their barbarities, one would have been moved to pity by their appearance. They were emaciated, clothes torn in tatters, some of their legs were not thicker than my arm.”⁴⁰

The last Tonto to come in was Chief Eschettlepan (referred to as Cha-lipan by the soldiers). When he surrendered he told Crook that his people:

could not go to sleep at night, because they feared to be surrounded before daybreak; they could not hunt—the noise of their guns would attract the troops; they could not cook mescal or anything else, because the flame and smoke would draw down the soldiers; they could not live in the valleys—there were too many soldiers; they had retreated to the mountaintops, thinking to hide in the snow until the soldiers went home, but the scouts found them out and the soldiers followed them . . . You see, we’re are [sic] nearly dead from want of food and exposure—the copper cartridge has done the business for us. I am glad of the opportunity to surrender, but I do it not because I love you, but because I am afraid of General.

During the Tonto Campaign Crook earned the name, Nantan Lupan, or Chief Gray Fox, an animal the Apache believed was a harbinger of death.”⁴¹

Crook’s prosecution of the Tonto Basin campaign was the foundation for the Army’s approach to fighting the Apache. The conventional thinking was that the Apache would not capitulate to reservation life. Crook knew he could only secure peace by defeating the Apache in battle, giving them no other option but to capitulate. The Apache’s advantage had always been their mastery of their harsh environment. The Apache were fine cavalrymen, but they formed poor cavalry units. They lacked decisive firepower and superior numbers, so they avoided direct conflict when they did not have the advantage. Crook, compiling all his experiences did not try to attack the Apache weaknesses; he drove headlong into their strengths.

Crook was bold and daring, taking calculated risks, knowing the consequences. He struck a critical balance in civil-military affairs and used perceived setbacks as opportunities to continue to develop his plan and prepare his men. In addition, when his opening came, he took full advantage, hunting the Apache on his terms leveraging his Army's full might in the process.

¹ Schmitt, 160. The Army Appropriations Bill of 1869 required made an immediate reduction necessary. The boards were named for the solvent used as a cleaner.

² Ibid.

³ Magid, *The Gray Fox*, 52.

⁴ Schmitt, 160.

⁵ Donald E. Worcester. *The Apaches: Eagles of the Southwest* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992), 4-7.

⁶ Andrew Paul Hutton, *The Apache Wars: The Hunt for Geronimo, the Apache Kid, and the Captive Boy Who Started the Longest War in American History* (New York: Crown Publishing, 2016), 119.

⁷ Ibid., 135-136; Magid, *The Gray Fox*, 62-63. Accounts from multiple sources differ on the exact number of people in the war party, but all settle on a number around 150. The Papagos Indians were bitter enemies of the Apache and had been in conflict with them for more than 200 years. The Papagos were amenable to farming and did not fight the American settling of the land, instead working to assimilate into the culture and establishing friendly relations.

⁸ Hutton, 136-138; Magid, *The Gray Fox*, 62-63.

⁹ John G. Bourke, *On the Border with Crook: General George Crook, the American Indian Wars, and Life on the American Frontier* (New York: Skyhorse Publishing, 2015), 103-104.

¹⁰ David Roberts. *Once They Moved Like the Wind: Cochise, Geronimo, and the Apache Wars* (New York: Touchstone, 1993), 74. "In due course more than a hundred of the conspirators were indicted. A trial was held in Tucson that lasted five days. At the end of it, a jury of the vigilantes' peers deliberated for nineteen minutes before returning a verdict of not guilty. The celebration lasted for days."

¹¹ U.S. House of Representatives, *Report of the Secretary of War 1867*, 82.

- ¹² Ibid., 83.
- ¹³ Ibid., 85.
- ¹⁴ Schmitt, 163.
- ¹⁵ Magid, *The Gray Fox*, 68.
- ¹⁶ Bourke, 137-138.
- ¹⁷ Ibid., 137.
- ¹⁸ Ibid., 142.
- ¹⁹ Magid, *The Gray Fox*, 70.
- ²⁰ Dan L. Thrapp, *The Conquest of Apacheria* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1967), 100.
- ²¹ Schmitt, 167-168.
- ²² Ibid., 170.
- ²³ Magid, *The Gray Fox*, 87. Crook's biographer gives weight to his critics. Crook may have been over anxious to blame the massacre on the Indians in order to undermine Colyer and be given the leeway to launch his offensive. Eventually, a group of Mexicans were hanged by vigilantes for the crime.
- ²⁴ Schmitt, 169.
- ²⁵ Ibid., 169-170.
- ²⁶ Ibid., 169.
- ²⁷ Ibid.
- ²⁸ Oliver O. Howard, *My Life and Experiences Among Our Hostile Indians* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1972), 151-152.
- ²⁹ Ibid., 152.
- ³⁰ Roberts, 96.
- ³¹ Schmitt, 174.
- ³² Magid, *The Gray Fox*, 104.

³³ Howard would indeed meet with and make peace with Cochise. He accomplished this by traveling into Cochise's stronghold hoping for a meeting at great personal risk.

³⁴ Schmitt, 173.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid., 175.

³⁷ Bourke, 182.

³⁸ Schmitt, 175.

³⁹ Magid, *The Gray Fox*, 108-109.

⁴⁰ Schmitt, 179.

⁴¹ Hutton, 162.

CHAPTER 5

A PROBLEM OF STRATEGY AND TACTICS; METHOD AND ORGANIZATION

What are they to do . . . I do not wonder, and you will not either, that when Indians see their wives and children starving and their last source of supplies cut off, they go to war. And then we are sent out there to kill them. It is an outrage. All tribes tell the same story. They are surrounded on all sides, the game destroyed or driven away, they are left to starve, and there remains but one thing for them to do—fight while they can.

— General George Crook, quoted in Martin Schmitt,
General George Crook, His Autobiography

General Crook remained in Arizona for two more years before transferring to the Department of the Platte to participate in the wars against the Plains Indians. Following the Plains War, Crook returned to Arizona to finally confront the Chiricahaus. Several factors led to the deterioration of the situation after Crook left, including terrible reservation management, the death of Cochise, and the rise of the great war captain, Geronimo. While most historians agree that Crook's bold and daring campaign into the Sierra Madre Mountains in Mexico, in 1883, served as the decisive blow to the Apache, Crook did not oversee the end of the Apache Wars. Under pressure for the manner in which he managed the Apache, Crook asked for his relief of command in Arizona in 1886, and General Sheridan accepted. Crook took command of the Department of the Platte and subsequently became the commander of the Division of the Missouri.

Shortly before Crook departed Arizona, the *Los Angeles Times* reporter Charles Fletcher Lummis, on assignment covering the conflict with the Apache offered this of General Crook:

I like the grim old General. There is that in him that makes one want to take off one's hat. There never was a soldier who fought against heavier odds with a stiffer upper lip. He has the same patient, persistent, uncomplaining and

unapologetic doggedness that was Grant's fundamental characteristic. To-day the most prominent figure in the army—the only one in the field—he occupies a larger place in public discussion than any other General. And in this exposed position, one of the fiercest fires is centered on him that ever whistled about a soldier's ears. Since the war none of its prominent commanders has been more persistently, more savagely, more cruelly hounded by jealousy, opposition and many another masked influence than has Crook. Almost without exception the Territorial papers have damned him—not with “faint praise,” but with bitterest invective. He has been cursed at, belittled and lied about, his policy misrepresented, his acts distorted, and alleged acts of his made up out of whole cloth . . . Let the lying go on as it will, telegraphed from end to end of the country—but he never opens his mouth He is here to fight, not to justify himself.¹

General George Crook died suddenly, from a heart attack, on March 21, 1890, at the age of fifty-nine years old. Crook spent his last days working to preserve peace with the Sioux and speaking across the country in favor of Indian rights, negotiated under treaty, and promised by the federal government. On hearing the news of Crook's death, the great Sioux Chief Red Cloud said, “General Crook came; he, at least, had never lied to us. His words gave the people hope. He died. Their hope died again. Despair comes again.” According to John Bourke, upon hearing of Crook's death, the Indians near Camp Apache, “wept and wailed like children.”²

This study set out to examine why was General George Crook such an effective Indian fighter. In the foreword to Crook's autobiography, Joseph Porter offered, “Crook's success on the warpath and his genuine concern for Indian welfare came from his knowledge of the environment and cultures of the Indians.”³ Porter was correct, Crook did not endeavor to fight like an Indian, his goal was to think like an Indian. Crook understood that the Native Americans were not in a war for lumber, gold, land, or bounty. They were in a struggle for their existence. He knew that the Indians would never put down their arms, until they were faced with their total defeat.

Crook was a true practitioner of Irregular Warfare. He recognized that the United States' overwhelming resources would eventually defeat the Indians. It was an issue of when their defeat would come, not if it would come. Crook was not perfect. War is complicated, and Irregular Warfare even more so. His failures are well documented, and vary from embarrassing to catastrophic. However, taken in total, the record shows, General Crook routinely succeeded where others failed, and for his troubles continued to receive exceedingly more difficult assignments.

What Crook understood, that many before him and since did not, was, in the words of the Twentieth Century French Counterinsurgency theorist David Galula explaining Irregular Warfare is, "primarily a problem of strategy and tactics, of method and organization."⁴ Strategy in conventional warfare dictates the seizure of enemy territory and defeat of their forces. Crook knew what now has become widely accepted as a tenant of Irregular Warfare. His enemy "holds no territory and refuses to fight for it. He is everywhere and nowhere."⁵ Therefore, that required Crook to be both everywhere and nowhere.

As Crook said in Boise, "I got interested after the Indian."⁶ His mission was to solve the Indian problem as if it were a puzzle. His natural curiosity fed his desire to learn the ways of the Indian. In addition, in turn, his cultural respect and understanding drove his military innovations. While he was not the first to use mules on the frontier, or employ Indians as scouts, he perfected their use to achieve his ends.

Crook's path to becoming a successful practitioner of Irregular Warfare is clear to see with benefit of hindsight. He began in California and the Oregon Territory, as a small unit leader, in a hostile, but not overwhelming environment. He had the resources he

needed, and the lack of oversight from direct leadership allowed him to experiment at the basic levels and apply what he was learning through trial and error.

When he arrived in Boise, he took the lessons tested and learned in the 1850s and applied them as a district commander. He implemented his logistics improvements, leaned heavily on Indian scouts, and tested the relentless campaigning he perfected later in Arizona. Crook started to manage multiple formations through territories cutting the Indians off from safe havens and their supplies.

Finally, when he became the head of the Department of Arizona, he put all these practices together as the commanding general of a field Army. Crook also had the added burden of balancing the civil-military relationship and working inside a federal government divided on how to tackle the problem. He never wavered in his resoluteness. Crook leveraged the Apache's warrior-hunter culture to enlist them as scouts, when others in Arizona believed they were not trustworthy. Reservation life was not appealing to the Apache and they only accepted it when faced with total defeat. However, for Apache men, groomed from early childhood to be a warrior, becoming a scout in the service of the Army was the only way to, "achieve rank and status in their society, and yet remain within the parameters set for them by the government."⁷ By leveraging long standing rivalries between tribes, the Apache bands settled feuds on the warpath, all while staying in the white man's good graces.

After more than twenty-five years working on the Indian problem, while speaking to the West Point graduates in 1884, Crook summarized perfectly his hard-fought understanding:

with all his faults, and he has many, the American Indian is not half so black as he has been painted. He is cruel in war, treacherous at times, and not overly cleanly. But so were our forefathers. His nature, however, is responsive to a treatment which assures him that it is based upon justice, truth, honesty, and common sense; it is not impossible that with a fair and square system of dealing with him the American Indian would make a better citizen than many who neglect the duties and abuse the privileges of that proud title.⁸

While reflecting on the French military experience in Indo-China and Algeria, the French officer, Roger Trinquier, offered, “[t]he inability of the army to adapt itself to changed circumstances has heavy consequences.”⁹ He goes on, “[w]e still persist in studying a type of warfare that no longer exists and that we shall never fight again . . . The result of this shortcoming is that the army is not prepared to confront an adversary employing arms and methods the army itself ignores. It has, therefore, no chance of winning.”¹⁰

Developing officers that can be successful at Irregular Warfare, as in the case of Crook, requires feeding intellectual curiosity and allowing young officers to develop in manageable environments that foster creative problem solving and collaborative learning. Irregular Warfare is a protracted struggle. There are no quick fixes or easy answers. The protracted struggle requires dogged determination and tireless focus. And finally, true understanding often requires full immersion, one learns Irregular Warfare by doing Irregular Warfare.

General George Crook’s ability to adapt to his enemy, and his understanding of the nuance and context required to fight a war against an unconventional foe, in what amounted to a true clash of civilizations, are the lessons that are as applicable to the modern United States military as they were on the American frontier.

¹ Thrapp, 26-27.

² Bourke, 486-487.

³ Schmidt, xii.

⁴ David Galula, *Counterinsurgency: Theory and Practice* (Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 2006), 50.

⁵.Ibid.

⁶ Schmitt, 144.

⁷ Magid, *The Gray Fox*, 71.

⁸ Schmitt, xx.

⁹ Roger Trinquier, *Modern Warfare: A French View of Counterinsurgency* (Fort Leavenworth: Combat Studies Institute, 1985), 4.

¹⁰ Ibid., 3.

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